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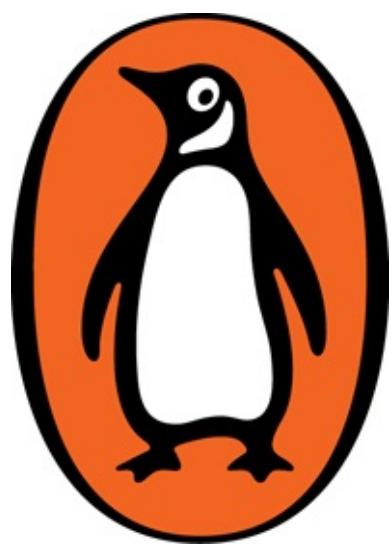
AVIATIC



Cécile
is Dead

INSPECTOR MAIGRET





Georges Simenon

CÉCILE IS DEAD

Translated by Anthea Bell



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Georges Simenon was born on 12 February 1903 in Liège, Belgium, and died in 1989 in Lausanne, Switzerland, where he had lived for the latter part of his life. Between 1931 and 1972 he published seventy-five novels and twenty-eight short stories featuring Inspector Maigret.

Simenon always resisted identifying himself with his famous literary character, but acknowledged that they shared an important characteristic:

My motto, to the extent that I have one, has been noted often enough, and I've always conformed to it. It's the one I've given to old Maigret, who resembles me in certain points ... 'understand and judge not'.

Penguin is publishing the entire series of Maigret novels.

PENGUIN CLASSICS

CÉCILE IS DEAD

‘I love reading Simenon. He makes me think of Chekhov’

– William Faulkner

‘A truly wonderful writer ... marvellously readable – lucid, simple, absolutely in tune with the world he creates’

– Muriel Spark

‘Few writers have ever conveyed with such a sure touch, the bleakness of human life’

– A. N. Wilson

‘One of the greatest writers of the twentieth century ... Simenon was unequalled at making us look inside, though the ability was masked by his brilliance at absorbing us obsessively in his stories’

– *Guardian*

‘A novelist who entered his fictional world as if he were part of it’

– Peter Ackroyd

‘The greatest of all, the most genuine novelist we have had in literature’

– André Gide

‘Superb ... The most addictive of writers ... A unique teller of tales’

– *Observer*

‘The mysteries of the human personality are revealed in all their disconcerting complexity’

– Anita Brookner

‘A writer who, more than any other crime novelist, combined a high literary reputation with popular appeal’

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‘A supreme writer ... Unforgettable vividness’

– *Independent*

‘Compelling, remorseless, brilliant’

– John Gray

‘Extraordinary masterpieces of the twentieth century’

– John Banville



1.

The pipe that Detective Chief Inspector Maigret lit on coming out of his door in Boulevard Richard-Lenoir was even more delicious than usual. The first fog of the season was as pleasant a surprise as the first snow for children, especially when it was not that nasty yellowish fog you see on certain winter days, but a misty, milky vapour with halos of light in it. The air was fresh. The ends of your fingers and your nose tingled on a day like this, and the soles of your shoes clicked smartly on the road.

Hands in the pockets of his large velvet-collared overcoat, famous at Quai des Orfèvres and still smelling slightly of mothballs, his bowler hat well down on his head, Maigret made his way to the Police Judiciaire on foot, at his leisure, and was amused when a girl suddenly shot out of the fog at a run and collided with his dark, solid form.

‘Oh, I’m sorry, sir.’

And she set off just as fast to catch her bus or Métro train.

It seemed as if all of Paris was enjoying the fog that morning, just like Inspector Maigret, and only the tugboats on the Seine hoarsely announced their uneasiness.

A memory was to stick in his mind for no good reason: he had just crossed Place de la Bastille on his way to Boulevard Henri-IV. He was passing a little bistro. The door opened, because it was the first time this season that the chill in the air had made the cafés close their doors. In passing, Maigret walked through a gust of aromatic air that was, to him, the quintessence of the Parisian dawn: the smell of good white coffee, hot croissants and just a touch of rum. He guessed

that behind the steamed-up windows ten, fifteen or twenty customers were sitting at the metal counter, enjoying their first meal of the day before hurrying off to work.

At nine o'clock precisely, he reached the vaulted entrance of the Police Judiciaire building and climbed the vast and ever-dusty staircase at the same time as several colleagues. As he reached the first floor he automatically glanced through the waiting-room windows and on recognizing Cécile, sitting on one of the chairs upholstered in green velour, he scowled.

Or rather, to be absolutely frank, he adopted a deliberately curmudgeonly expression.

'Hey, Maigret, there she is!'

The speaker was Cassieux, head of the Drug Squad, coming upstairs just after him. And the joke would go on, just as it always did when Cécile visited the office.

Maigret tried to get past without being seen. How long had she been there? She was capable of staying put for hours in the same place, motionless, her hands folded on top of her bag, her ridiculous green hat always tilted slightly sideways on her rather too carefully arranged hair.

Of course she spotted the inspector and sprang to her feet. Her mouth opened. She was inaudible because of the glazed partition, but she must be sighing, 'At last!'

Shoulders hunched, Maigret hurried to his office at the end of the corridor. The clerk came over to tell him ...

'I know, I know,' growled Maigret. 'I don't have time at the moment.'

Because of the fog, he had to switch on the lamp with its green shade on his desk. He took off his overcoat, his hat, looked at the stove, thinking that if it was as chilly as this tomorrow he would ask to have it lit, and then, after rubbing his cold hands together, sat down heavily, with a growl of contentment, and took the telephone off the hook.

'Hello ... is that the Vieux Normand café? ... Will you get me Monsieur Janvier, please? ... Hello, is that you, Janvier?'

Inspector Janvier would have been sitting in that little café-restaurant in Rue Saint-Antoine since seven in the morning, keeping watch on the Hôtel des Arcades.

‘Any news?’

‘They’re all back in the nest, boss. The woman went out half an hour ago to buy bread, butter and a quarter kilo of ground coffee. She’s just back.’

‘Is Lucas in position?’

‘I saw him at the window when I got here.’

‘Right, Jourdan will be along to relieve you. Not too frozen, I hope?’

‘A bit chilly. Not too bad.’

Maigret smiled, thinking of the change in Sergeant Lucas, who had transformed himself into a disabled old man four days ago. It was a case of keeping watch on the gang of Poles, five or six of them, who were staying in a squalid room in the squalid Hôtel des Arcades. There was no evidence against them, except that one of them, known as the Baron, had paid at the tote on Longchamp racecourse with one of the banknotes stolen from the Vansittart farm.

The members of the gang moved around Paris with no obvious purpose, but they met in Rue de Birague, and the central figure there was a young woman; the police hadn’t yet worked out whose mistress she was, or what exactly her role was in the gang.

At the window of an apartment opposite, muffled up in scarves, Lucas was keeping watch on them from morning to evening in his disguise.

Maigret rose to empty his pipe in the coal scuttle. He chose another from the desk, where he kept quite a collection, caught sight of the form that Cécile had filled in and was about to read what she had written, but at that moment a bell rang in the corridor and went on ringing.

The briefing! He snatched up the files he had ready and, along with all the other departmental heads, went to the office of the commissioner of the Police Judiciaire. This little ritual took place every morning. The commissioner had long white hair and a goatee beard like a musketeer’s. Everyone shook hands.

‘Did you see her?’

Maigret looked surprised.

‘Who?’

‘Cécile! Now if I was Madame Maigret ...’

Poor Cécile! And yet she was still young. Maigret had seen her papers: barely twenty-eight years old. But it would be difficult to look more like an old maid, to

move less gracefully, no matter how hard she tried to be pleasing. Those black dresses that she must make for herself from bad paper patterns, that ridiculous green hat! It was impossible to perceive any feminine allure under all that. Her face was too pale, and she had a slight squint into the bargain.

‘She’s cross-eyed,’ claimed Inspector Cassieux.

He was exaggerating; she wasn’t exactly cross-eyed. It was just that her left eye didn’t look in quite the same direction as her right eye.

She would arrive at eight in the morning, already resigned to her fate.

‘Detective Chief Inspector Maigret, please.’

‘I don’t know if he’ll be in this morning. You could see Inspector Berger, who ...’

‘No, thank you. I’ll wait.’

And wait she did, all day, without moving, without any sign of impatience, suddenly leaping up, as if she were a prey to emotion, when the inspector came upstairs.

‘I tell you, old friend, she’s in love with you.’

The officers stayed on their feet. They chatted about this and that at first, and then, almost imperceptibly, got down to work.

‘How’s the Pélican case going, Cassieux? Any news?’

‘I’ve called in the manager for ten o’clock. He’ll have to talk.’

‘Go carefully, will you? He has a parliamentary deputy protecting him, and I don’t want a lot of fuss. What about your Poles, Maigret?’

‘I’m still waiting. I’m planning to investigate their hideout myself tonight. If there’s nothing new tomorrow I’ll try to have a heart-to-heart with the woman.’

A nasty bunch. Three crimes committed within six months, all at isolated farms in the north of the country. Coarse, brutal banditry, axe murders ...

The fog was turning golden. Electric light wasn’t necessary now. The commissioner of the Police Judiciaire drew a file towards him. ‘If you have a moment this morning, Maigret ... here’s some research into family interests. A young man of nineteen, the son of a large industrialist, who ...’

‘Let me have a look.’

The briefing went on for half an hour, while the air in the room was filled with pipe and cigarette smoke, and was interrupted from time to time by phone calls.

‘Yes, sir ... certainly, minister.’

And there was a constant racket of police officers coming and going in the huge corridor, doors opening and closing, telephone conversations in the offices.

Maigret, his file under his arm, went back to his own office. He was thinking of the gang of Poles. Automatically, he put the file down on the form that Cécile had filled in. Almost as soon as he was sitting down, the clerk knocked on his door.

‘It’s about that girl ...’

‘Yes?’

‘Are you going to see her?’

‘In a little while.’

First he wanted to finish dealing with the case that the boss had handed him. He knew where to find the young man concerned; he had already had dealings with him.

‘Hello ... get me the Hôtel Myosotis, Rue Blanche.’

It was a shabby hotel, where the young man and others like him met, took cocaine and made no secret of their habit.

‘Hello? Listen to me, Francis, I think you’re finally going to have to close that place of yours ... What? Well, that’s just too bad ... You’re going too far. If you want some good advice, send me young Duchemin right away. Or even better, bring him here yourself. I have a couple of things to say to him ... Of course. He’s with you ... And if he isn’t I’m sure you’ll manage to unearth him for me before midday ... Yes, I’m counting on it.’

Someone was already calling him on another phone. An embarrassed examining magistrate.

‘Is that Detective Chief Inspector Maigret? It’s about Pénicaid, inspector. He claims that you intimidated him into confessing, he says you got him to undress in your office and then left him there for five hours completely naked ...’

And there were still orders to be given to the junior inspectors waiting in the next-door office, hats tipped over their ears, cigarettes in their mouths. It was eleven before he remembered Cécile, and he pressed the electric bell.

‘Ask the girl to come in.’

The clerk returned alone a few moments later. ‘She’s left, inspector.’

‘Oh.’

First he shrugged his shoulders. Then, sitting down again, he frowned. This wasn't like Cécile, who had once spent seven hours in the waiting room without moving. He looked for her form among the papers littering his desk, and finally found it under young Duchemin's file.

You simply must see me. A terrible thing happened last night.

CÉCILE PARDON

The clerk came back when he rang again.

'Listen, Léopold,' (the man's name wasn't Léopold, but his resemblance to the former king of the Belgians had earned him that nickname) 'when did she leave?'

'I don't know, sir. I've been called into all the offices. Half an hour ago she was still there.'

'Were there many people in the waiting room?'

'Two to see the boss. A middle-aged man wanting to know about our legal warrants. And then ... well, you know how it is in the morning, all that coming and going. I can only tell you that the young lady wasn't there.'

Maigret felt a small and unpleasant sensation, a niggling anxiety, in his chest. He didn't like it. They had made too much fun of poor Cécile.

'If she should come back, you ...'

No. He changed his mind and called one of his inspectors.

'The proprietor of the Hôtel Myosotis will be here in a few minutes' time with a young man called Duchemin. Get them to wait. If I'm not back by midday, keep the young man here and send the hotelier back to his own business.'

Once at Pont Saint-Michel, he almost hailed a taxi, which could be a sign. Just because it could be a sign he didn't do it and waited for a tram. He didn't want to ascribe too much importance to Cécile, which would be tantamount to admitting that ...

The fog, instead of lifting, had come down more densely, although it wasn't so cold. Maigret smoked his pipe on the platform of the tram, with his head bobbing to the jerky movements and the intermittent braking of the vehicle.

When had Cécile first visited the Police Judiciaire? About six months ago. He had left his notebook on his desk, but he could check when he got back. She had asked immediately for Detective Chief Inspector Maigret. True, she could have

seen his name in the newspapers. She was calm. Did she realize that the story she told sounded like the work of an over-fertile imagination?

She was trying to speak with composure, looking the inspector straight in the face, and she corrected the more extravagant passages of her story with a smile.

'I assure you, inspector, I'm not making anything up, and I'm not gullible either. I know where everything in the room ought to stand, since I do the housework myself. My aunt would never have a maid. The first time it happened I might have thought I was mistaken. But after that I paid careful attention. And yesterday I looked for certain marks. I've gone further than that. I stretched a thread across the front doorway ... and not only had two chairs changed places, my thread was broken. So someone has been in our apartment. Someone has spent a certain amount of time in the sitting room, and in particular opened my aunt's desk, because I left a clue there as well. That's the third time in two months. These days my aunt can do almost nothing, no one has the key to the apartment, yet the lock hadn't been forced. I didn't want to talk to Aunt Juliette about it for fear of worrying her. However, I'm certain that nothing has gone. She'd have told me if it had, because she has a very suspicious nature.'

'So the fact is,' Maigret had summed up, 'you are saying that for the third time in two months some unknown person entered the apartment where you and your aunt live, that this person spent time in the sitting room and changed the position of the chairs ...'

'And the blotting pad too,' she pointed out.

'Changed the position of the chairs and the blotting pad and searched your aunt's desk, which was locked but shows no signs of being forced ...'

'And I should add that someone was smoking there that evening,' she persisted. 'My aunt doesn't smoke, nor do I, and no man called to see us yesterday. But the sitting room smelled of tobacco this morning.'

'I'll come and look ...'

'Oh, that's what I'd like to avoid. My aunt isn't easy to deal with. She'd be cross with me, especially as I didn't tell her about it ...'

'Then what do you expect the police to do?'

'I don't know ... I trust you ... maybe if you were to spend a few nights on the staircase outside ...?'

Poor thing, imagining that a detective chief inspector of police had nothing better to do than spend the night in a stairway to check up on a girl's stories!

'I'll send you Lucas tonight.'

'You won't come yourself?'

No, for heaven's sake no! She was going too far. And her resentment – here Maigret's colleagues were right – was like that of a woman in love.

'You see, it might not be tonight. It could be in three, five, maybe ten days. How do I know? I'm afraid, inspector. The idea of a man ...'

'Where do you live?'

'In Bourg-la-Reine, a kilometre from Porte d'Orléans, on the main road ... just opposite the fifth tram stop. It's a big five-storey apartment building, brick, and there's a bicycle shop and a grocer's on the ground floor. We live on the fifth floor.'

Lucas had gone there and had asked the neighbours questions. When he came back he was sceptical.

'An old lady who hasn't been out of the place for months, and her niece who acts as her maid-servant and looks after her in general.'

The local police were asked to keep an eye on the building, which was under surveillance for almost a month. No one ever saw anyone but the tenants going in and out of it by night.

And yet Cécile kept returning to Quai des Orfèvres.

'He's been back again, inspector. This time he left ink marks on the blotter. I'd changed the blotting paper yesterday evening.'

'And he didn't take anything away?'

'No, nothing.'

Maigret had been imprudent enough to tell the story to his colleagues, and the whole of Quai des Orfèvres was greatly amused.

'Maigret has made a conquest.'

They went to take a look at the young lady with the squint through the glazed partition of the waiting room and then visited Maigret's office.

'Quick – there's someone to see you!'

'Who is it?'

'Your love-sick admirer.'

Lucas had spent eight nights running lying in wait in the stairwell of the building and had neither seen nor heard anything.

‘It could be tomorrow,’ Cécile said.

It was left at that.

‘Cécile is here ...’

Cécile was famous. Everyone called her Cécile. If a junior officer wanted to see Maigret, he was told, ‘Careful. There’s someone in there.’

‘Who is it?’

‘Cécile.’

Maigret changed to another tram at Porte d’Orléans and got off at the fifth stop. A building rose on the right, by itself, alone between two tracts of waste land; you might have thought you were on a thin slice of road, cut from a block of Neapolitan ice cream.

Nothing out of the ordinary. Cars were driving towards Arpajon and Orléans. Trucks were coming back from Les Halles. The door of the apartment building was wedged between the bicycle shop and the grocery. The concierge was peeling carrots.

‘Has Mademoiselle Pardon come home yet?’

‘Mademoiselle Cécile? I don’t think so. You can always ring the bell, and Madame Boynet will open the door.’

‘I thought she was disabled.’

‘Almost, but she’s had a system rigged up so that she can open the door from her armchair, like in my lodge here. That’s to say, if she wants to.’

Five floors. Maigret hated stairs. These were dark, and the stairwell was covered with wallpaper the colour of tobacco juice. The walls were well seasoned; the smell changed from landing to landing, depending on what people were cooking. So did the noises. Piano music, children yowling, and somewhere the echoes of a heated argument.

There was a dusty business card, saying ‘Jean Siveschi’, under the electric bell on the left-hand door on the fifth floor, so it must be the door on the right that he wanted. He rang the bell there. The sound passed from room to room, but there was no click, and the door did not open. He rang again. His uneasiness was turning to anxiety and his anxiety to remorse.

‘What is it?’ asked a woman’s voice behind him.

He turned and saw a plump young woman whose blue dressing gown made her look even more alluring.

‘Madame Boynet ...’

‘I’m sure she’s in,’ the young woman replied with a slight foreign accent.
‘Hasn’t anyone answered the door? That’s odd ...’

She rang the bell herself, revealing a little flesh as she raised her arm to reach the cord that worked it.

‘Even if Cécile is out, her aunt should ...’

Maigret stood around on the landing for ten minutes and then had to walk nearly a kilometre to find a locksmith. Not only did the young woman come running again at the sound of the bell, so did her mother and her sister.

‘Do you think there’s been an accident?’

It proved possible to open the door without forcing the lock, which showed no traces of violence. Maigret was the first to enter the apartment. It was crowded with old furniture and knick-knacks; he didn’t notice the details. A sitting room. A dining room. An open door, and on a mahogany bedstead an old lady with tinted hair who ...

‘Please go away, do you hear?’ he called, turning to the three neighbours. ‘If you find this kind of thing entertaining, I can only say I’m sorry for you.’

A strange corpse: a plump little old woman, heavily made up, her hair light blonde, over-bleached – you could see white at the roots – wearing a red dressing gown and a stocking, just one stocking on the leg which was dangling over the edge of the bed.

There could be no possible doubt about it; she had been strangled.

He went out on the landing again and, his voice harsh and anxious, said, ‘Someone find me a local police officer.’

Five minutes later, he was phoning from the glazed telephone booth of a nearby bistro.

‘Hello? Detective Chief Inspector Maigret, yes ... Who’s this on the phone? All right ... Tell me, young man, has Cécile come back? ... Then go to the public prosecutor’s office ... Try to see the public prosecutor himself ... Tell him ... Are you listening?. ... No, I’m staying here. Hello! And tell Criminal Records ... If by some miracle Cécile does turn up there ... What was that? No, young man, this is no time for silly jokes ...’

When he left the bistro, after drinking a quick glass of rum at the bar, fifty people were stationed outside the apartment building in a formation like a rectangular block of ice cream.

In spite of himself, he looked around for Cécile.

Not until five in the afternoon was he to learn that Cécile was dead.



2.

Yet again, Madame Maigret would be waiting beside the round dining table, where she had laid two places. She was inured to it! And installing a telephone had been no use: Maigret forgot to let her know he'd be late. As for young Duchemin, Cassieux was going to teach him the traditional lesson.

Slowly, with an anxious frown on his brow, the inspector had climbed those five floors again without noticing that there were tenants outside their apartments on all the landings. It was Cécile he was thinking of, that ungainly girl who had been the butt of so many of their jokes. Some of them in the Police Judiciaire called her Maigret's lovebird.

This was where she had lived, in this ordinary suburban apartment building; she used to climb up and down these gloomy stairs every day; this was the atmosphere that still clung to her clothes when she came, scared and patient, to sit in the waiting room at Quai des Orfèvres.

And when Maigret did condescend to see her, he reflected, it was to ask, with a gravity that did a poor job of concealing his sarcasm, ‘So did any other items go for a walk in your apartment last night? Has the inkwell made it to the other end of the table? Did the paper-knife escape from its drawer?’

Up on the fifth floor he told the policeman not to let anyone into the apartment. He was about to open the door himself, then he thought better of it and examined the mechanism of the doorbell. It was not an electric bell, but was worked by a stout red and yellow cord that hung from it. He pulled the cord. A sound like the ringing of a convent bell was heard in the sitting room.

‘Officer, please make sure that no one touches this door.’

That was in case of any fingerprints, although he doubted that there would be any. He was in a bad mood. He couldn't shake off the image of Cécile sitting in the Aquarium – as they called the waiting room at police headquarters, because one wall consisted entirely of glass.

He wasn't a doctor, but it had not been difficult for him to see that the old lady's death had occurred several hours earlier, well before her niece's arrival at Quai des Orfèvres.

Had Cécile witnessed the crime? If so, she hadn't told anyone and she hadn't cried out. She had stayed in the apartment until morning, with the corpse for company, and she had washed and dressed as usual. He had paid her enough attention when he arrived at the Police Judiciaire to see that her appearance was normal.

Furthermore, he immediately checked a detail that struck him as important. He searched for her room and failed to find it at first. The apartment had three rooms at the front of the building: the sitting room, the dining room and the aunt's bedroom.

To the right of the corridor, there was a kitchen and a scullery. But on the other side of the kitchen he opened a door and found a small room, dimly lit by a fanlight, furnished with an iron bedstead, a wash-basin and a wardrobe. It obviously acted as Cécile's bedroom.

The bed was unmade, there was soapy water in the basin, some dark hairs caught in the teeth of her comb. A salmon-pink dressing gown had been dropped on a chair.

Did Cécile already know when she was dressing? It was hardly light when she had come out into the street, or rather the main road that passed in front of the building, and she had waited for the tram at the stop at least a hundred metres away. The fog had been thick.

When she reached the Police Judiciaire she had filled in her form and then sat down in front of the black frame containing pictures of the police officers who had been killed in action.

At last Maigret appeared on the stairs. She jumped to her feet. He was going to see her. She would be able to talk to him ...

But she had been kept waiting for over an hour. The corridors were full of people coming and going. Inspectors kept calling out to each other. Doors

opened and closed again. People came to sit in the Aquarium, and the clerk called them one after another. Only she was left ... only Cécile was always kept waiting.

What had made her decide to leave?

Maigret had been automatically filling his pipe. He heard voices out on the landing: tenants discussing what had happened, and the local police officer quietly advising them to go home.

What had become of Cécile?

That question never left his mind for the full hour that he spent alone in the apartment. It lent him the weighty look, as if he were asleep, that his colleagues knew so well.

And yet, in his own way, he was working. He was already impregnated with the atmosphere of the building. Right from the front hall, or rather the long, dark corridor that did duty for a front hall, it smelled of old age and mediocrity. In this tiny apartment there was enough furniture for twice as many rooms, all of it old and of different periods and styles, and none of it worth anything at all. The place reminded him of provincial auctions when suddenly, after a death or a bankruptcy, the public was admitted into the secrets of austere middle-class households.

On the other hand, it was neat and tidy, and meticulous cleanliness reigned. Every surface, however tiny, was polished; the smallest knick-knacks stood in their proper places.

The apartment might just as well have been lit by candlelight or oil- or gas-lamps as by electricity. It was of no particular period, and there were old fittings for oil-lamps that now held electric bulbs.

The sitting room was more like a junk shop, its walls covered with family portraits, watercolours and worthless engravings in black and gilt imitation carved frames made of wood. An enormous mahogany partners' desk, such as you still see used by the stewards of grand houses, took pride of place by the window. Wrapping his hand in a handkerchief, Maigret opened its drawers one by one. Some of them contained keys, ends of sealing-wax sticks, boxes of pills, a lorgnette frame, diaries twenty years old, yellowing bills. The desk had not been forced open. Four of the drawers were empty.

Shabby armchairs with tapestry upholstery, a little cabinet, a work table, two Louis XIV-style case clocks. Maigret found another clock of the same kind in the dining room. There was another in the front hall, and he found, with almost amused surprise, that two more such clocks were among the furnishings of the dead woman's bedroom.

She obviously had a mania for them! The strangest thing was that all the clocks were working. Maigret realized that at midday when they began striking one after another.

The dining room too was so full of furniture that you could hardly move around in it. As elsewhere in the apartment, there were thick curtains at the windows. You might have thought the inhabitants feared the light of day.

Why was the old woman wearing a single stocking when death took her by surprise in the middle of the night? He looked for the other one and found it on the rug. Stout black woollen stockings. The old lady's legs were swollen and bluish, and Maigret concluded that Cécile's aunt had dropsy. A walking-stick that he found on the floor showed she was not entirely confined to her bed and could get around the apartment.

Finally, hanging above the bed, there was a cord like the one on the landing. He pulled it, listened, heard the front door opening, went to close it again and grumbled when he saw the tenants still occupying the landing.

Why had Cécile left Quai des Orfèvres suddenly? What could have made her decide to do so, when she had such serious news to give him?

Only she knew. Only she could tell him, and Maigret was getting increasingly anxious as time went on.

In spite of himself, he wondered what the two women did all day as he looked at all that furniture, the surfaces overloaded with fragile spun glass and china ornaments, each uglier than its neighbour, glass globes with the grotto of Lourdes or the Bay of Naples inside them, portrait photos precariously balancing in copper-wire frames, an almost transparent Japanese cup with a handle that had been stuck back on it, artificial flowers in champagne flutes that didn't match.

He went back to the bedroom where Cécile's aunt still lay on her mahogany bed, with that inexplicable detail of a stocking on one leg.

It was about one o'clock when he heard movements on the pavement outside, then on the stairs and the landing. At that moment the inspector was sitting in the

depths of one of the armchairs, in his overcoat and with his hat on his head, and the air was blue with the smoke from his pipe. He jumped, as if waking from a dream. Voices met his ears.

'How are things going, inspector?' It was Bideau, the deputy public prosecutor, offering his hand with a smile. He was followed by the tiny figure of Marbille the examining magistrate, the forensic pathologist and a clerk already looking for a table where he could spread out his papers. 'Interesting case?' Bideau continued. 'Heavens, not exactly cheerful here, is it?'

Next moment the van from Criminal Records drew up beside the pavement, and the photographers invaded the apartment building with their bulky cameras. Intimidated, the Bourg-la-Reine police inspector joined these gentlemen, upset that no one was paying him any attention.

'Go home, ladies and gentlemen,' the local officer on duty at the door repeated to the tenants. 'There's nothing to see here. You'll be questioned one by one soon, but for heaven's sake go away now! Go away! I said go away!'

It was five in the afternoon. The fog had turned to a drizzle, and the streetlights had come on earlier than usual. Maigret, hat well down on his forehead, went in through the icy porch of the Police Judiciaire building and quickly climbed the dimly lit stairs.

An involuntary glance at the Aquarium, which looked more like a real aquarium than ever in the electric light, showed him four or five people waiting, as motionless as the waxworks in the Grévin museum. The inspector wondered why green wallpaper and a green set of table and chairs had been chosen for the waiting room; they cast a deathly hue on all faces.

'I think you're wanted, sir,' said one of Maigret's junior colleagues in passing, files tucked under his arm.

'The boss would like to see you,' said the clerk in his turn, looking up from the stamps that he was sticking on envelopes.

Without going to his own office first, Maigret knocked on the commissioner's door. The only light in his office came from the desk lamp.

'Well, Maigret?' There was silence from the inspector. 'A tiresome case, don't you agree? I suppose there's no news from the scene of the crime?'

Maigret sensed that there was unwelcome information coming. He waited, his heavy brows drawn together.

‘I sent a message to warn you, but you’d already left Bourg-la-Reine. It’s about that girl … a little while ago Victor …’

Victor, who had a stammer, was one of the concierges in the Palais de Justice. He had a walrus moustache and a voice as raucous as an old seadog’s.

‘… Victor was going along the corridor when he met the public prosecutor in a bad mood. Is this, the public prosecutor asked him, what you call a properly swept floor, my friend?’

Everyone knew what it meant when the public prosecutor called someone his friend. Maigret’s mind was intent on anticipating what the head of the PJ was going to tell him.

‘To cut a long story short, he put the fear of God into Victor, who went straight to the broom cupboard. Guess what he found there?’

‘Cécile,’ said the inspector, unsurprised, as he lowered his head. He had had plenty of time at Bourg-la-Reine, while the usual procedures were going on round him, to think of all the hypotheses about Cécile’s departure, and none of them satisfied him. He kept returning to the same question: *What can have induced her to leave Quai des Orfèvres when she had such serious news to tell me?*

He felt increasingly certain that it had not been her own idea to leave the waiting room. Someone had joined her there, at the headquarters of the police force itself, only a little way from Maigret, and Cécile had followed that person.

What argument had been used? Who had enough power over the young woman to …?

And now, suddenly, he understood.

‘I might have known it!’ he muttered, striking his forehead with his fist.

‘What do you mean?’

‘I might have guessed she wouldn’t leave this building. I should have known nothing would make her leave it …’

He was furious with himself.

‘Dead, of course,’ he growled, looking at the floor.

‘Yes. If you’d like to come with me …’

The commissioner pushed a bell and told the office boy, ‘If anyone phones or wants to see me, I’ll be back in a minute.’

They were both downcast, but Maigret also had a guilty conscience. A day that had started so well! That delicious waft of air scented with coffee, croissants and rum came back to his mind. The morning’s luminous misty air ...

‘Oh, and by the way, Janvier telephoned. It seems that your Poles ...’

Maigret waved a hand as if to dismiss all the Poles on earth from his mental horizon.

The commissioner had opened a glazed door. They had talked of bricking up that doorway for at least ten years, but for practical reasons nothing was ever done. The door took you straight from the Police Judiciaire to the courtrooms of the Palais de Justice and Records. It was rather like being behind the scenes in a theatre: narrow staircases, winding passages. When you had a defendant to be taken to the public prosecutor’s office ...

On the right, the stairs leading to the attic storey, Criminal Records and the laboratory. Further on, a door with frosted glass panels, and beyond that door the sound of the law courts in the Palais de Justice, lawyers coming and going, curious members of the public, interested onlookers following hearings in the courts and the proceedings in criminal trials.

An officer was smoking a cigarette outside a narrower door, set for no apparent reason right in the middle of a wall. He put his cigarette out when he saw the two men coming.

Who knew about this door? The answer to that was: everyone familiar with the police headquarters building! It opened into a large cupboard, a cavity reaching some two metres back, where Victor, who wasn’t fond of taking unnecessary exercise, kept buckets and brooms.

The man on duty at the door went away. The commissioner opened it, and as there was no light in the broom cupboard struck a match.

‘There she is,’ he said.

As Cécile tumbled in, she had not even been able to fall full length, and she was wedged against the wall, while her head was bent on her chest.

Maigret suddenly felt hot, mopped his face with his handkerchief, and dug his pipe into his pocket, even though he had lit it.

There was no need for words. The commissioner and the inspector looked at one another, and the latter automatically took off his hat.

‘Do you know what I think, sir? Someone went into the waiting room and told her that I was ready to see her, but not in my office. Someone she believed was from the Police Judiciaire.’

The commissioner inclined his head.

‘It had to be done fast, do you see? She was told that, all of a sudden, I could see her. She knew who had killed her aunt. Opening this door – total darkness inside it – and when Cécile took a step ...’

‘She was hit with a cosh or something like that first, to stun her.’

The ridiculous green hat, lying on the floor, confirmed this hypothesis. Besides, there was a little clotted blood in the girl’s dark hair.

‘She must have swayed, perhaps she fell, and the murderer finished her off without a sound by strangling her.’

‘Are you sure, sir?’

‘That’s what Forensics think. I wanted them to wait for you before carrying out an autopsy. Why are you surprised? Her aunt was strangled too, wasn’t she?’

‘Exactly ...’

‘What do you mean, Maigret?’

‘I mean I don’t think the same man could have committed both crimes. When Cécile turned up this morning she knew who had killed her aunt.’

‘Do you think so?’

‘If she hadn’t known, she’d have raised the alarm earlier. The forensic pathologist says her aunt died before two in the morning. Either Cécile saw the murder take place ...’

‘Why wouldn’t the murderer have killed her at Bourg-la-Reine as well?’

‘Maybe she hid ... let me go on. Either she saw it happen, or she discovered her aunt’s body when she got up at about six thirty in the morning. I know from her alarm clock that she rose at that time. And she didn’t tell anyone. She came straight here.’

‘How strange!’

‘Not if we assume that she knew the murderer. She wanted to tell me about it in person; she didn’t trust the police in Bourg-la-Reine. And the proof that she knew him is that she was killed to keep her from talking.’

‘Suppose you had seen her as soon as you got in this morning?’

Maigret blushed, something that he very seldom did. ‘Well, yes ... There’s something I’ve missed ... Perhaps the murderer wasn’t able to move freely at that moment ... Or else he didn’t know yet ...’ He suddenly looked as if he were hunting something down. ‘No, it doesn’t hold water,’ he growled.

‘What doesn’t hold water?’

‘What I’m saying. If the old lady’s killer had turned up at the Aquarium ...’

‘Aquarium?’

‘Sorry, sir, that’s what the officers call the waiting room. If he’d turned up there, Cécile wouldn’t have followed him. So someone else came. Someone she didn’t know, or someone she trusted ...’

The ever-stubborn Maigret looked at the dark little heap that had fallen against the wall of the broom cupboard, among the brushes and buckets.

‘It was someone she didn’t know,’ he suddenly decided.

‘Why?’

‘She might have followed someone she knew outside, but not in here. I might as well tell you I was expecting her to be found in the Seine or on waste land somewhere. But ...’

He took a couple of steps, bent to get through the low doorway of the cupboard, struck a match and then another, gently nudged the corpse.

‘What are you looking for, Maigret?’

‘Her bag.’ It was as characteristic of her as her comical green hat, a voluminous bag like an attaché case that Cécile always held on her lap like something precious when she was in the Aquarium.

‘It’s gone.’

‘From which you conclude ...?’

Here Maigret, forgetting the hierarchy of rank and letting his nerves get the better of him, snapped, ‘Conclude! Conclude! Are you able to come to any conclusions?’

He noticed that the blond officer who had been posted at the door a few paces away turned his head, and then Maigret began again.

‘I apologize, sir, but you’ll agree that anyone can go in and out of this place just as they like. Someone could have gone into the waiting room and ...’

His nerves were all on edge. He clenched the stem of his pipe, which had gone out, between his teeth. ‘Not to mention that damn door that should have been bricked up ages ago.’

‘If you’d seen the girl when ...’

Poor Maigret was a sad sight: tall and strong, solid as a rock to all outward appearances, bending his head to look at that pile of soft clothes at his feet, that heap of inert matter, mopping his face with his handkerchief yet again.

‘Well, what are we going to do?’ asked the commissioner, hoping to change the subject.

Were they going to let the public know that a crime had been committed on the premises of the Police Judiciaire, or rather in a kind of passage linking the police headquarters to the law courts?

‘There’s one thing I’d like to ask, sir. Could Lucas take over the case of the Poles ...?’

Perhaps it was hunger. Maigret hadn’t eaten since breakfast. And he had drunk three small shots of spirits, which had given him an appetite.

‘Yes, if you like.’

‘Close that door, will you?’ Maigret told the officer. ‘And stay on guard. I’ll be back right away.’

From his office, and keeping his hat and coat on, he phoned Madame Maigret.

‘No, I don’t know just when I’ll be back. ... It’s too complicated to explain ... no, no, I’m here in Paris!’

Should he call for some sandwiches to be brought in from the Brasserie Dauphine, as usual? But he needed fresh air. Fine rain was still falling outside. He preferred the little bar in the middle of the Pont-Neuf, close to the statue of Henri IV.

‘Ham,’ he ordered when he got there.

‘Are you all right, inspector?’

The waiter knew him. When Maigret’s eyelids seemed so heavy, and he had that stubborn look ...

‘Work, is it?’

Some of the customers were intent on a game of cards near the counter. Others were playing the fruit machine.

Maigret bit into his sandwich, thinking that Cécile was dead. In spite of his heavy overcoat, it sent a cold shiver down his spine.



3.

When someone mused out loud in Maigret's presence about the resignation to their lot of the humble, sick and disabled, of the thousands of people who lived reclusive lives in the honeycomb cells of the big city, seeing no better prospects ahead of them, he would often shrug his shoulders. He knew from experience that human beings will adapt to anywhere they find themselves, as soon as they can fill that place with their own warmth, odour and habits.

The concierge's lodge, where the inspector was seated in a creaking wicker chair, measured less than two metres fifty by three metres. Its ceiling was low. The glazed door, which had no curtain over it, looked out on the darkness of the corridor, for there was no light in the stairwell until a tenant turned the time switch on. The lodge contained a bed with a red eiderdown, and on the table with its waxed brown tablecloth lay the cold remains of a pig's trotter, part of a white loaf, a knife and a glass with purplish dregs of wine in it.

Sitting on a chair, Madame With-All-Due-Respect was talking to him, her cheek almost welded to her shoulder because of her chronic stiff neck, her throat wrapped for warmth in thermal wadding of a nasty pink shade that contrasted with her black scarf.

'No, inspector, with all due respect I won't take the armchair. It was my late husband's, and in spite of my age and all my little aches and pains it wouldn't feel right for me to sit in it myself.'

There was a musty smell in the room, spiced with tom-cat pee. The tom-cat responsible was purring in front of the stove. The electric lightbulb, dim with a layer of dust twenty years old, had a red tinge to it. It was warm. The sound of

rain falling on zinc somewhere could be heard, and now and then so could the sound of a car driving fast along the main road, the din of heavy trucks passing and the squealing brakes of trams.

‘As I was telling you, with all due respect, the poor lady was our owner. Juliette Boynet. Boynet was her late husband’s name. And when I say *poor lady*, it’s out of respect for the dead, because she was a proper cow, God rest her soul. At least the good Lord recently did us the favour of almost depriving her of the use of her legs. It’s not that I bear any more malice than the next person, I’m not one to wish my neighbours ill, but when she could get about like everyone else life wasn’t worth living.’

At the Bourg-la-Reine police station just now, Maigret had been surprised to hear that the dead woman was not yet sixty. In spite of her badly tinted hair, her puffy face made her look older, and so did the large eyes almost popping out of her head.

Juliette-Marie-Jeanne-Léontine Boynet, née Cazenove, aged 59, born in Fontenay-le-Comte, Vendée; profession, none ...

Madame With-All-Due-Respect, with her neck awry, her hair in a tight bun like a peach stone, the black wool scarf pulled tightly round her thin chest – you couldn’t help thinking that the old concierge’s chest wouldn’t be a pretty sight – was telling her rosary of grievances with much the same avid satisfaction as she must have felt when eating her pig’s trotter a little earlier. From time to time she glanced at the glazed door.

‘As you see, the house is quiet. At this time of day everyone has come home, or almost everyone.’

‘How long has Madame Boynet been the owner of this apartment building?’

‘For ever, I should think. Her husband was a building contractor. He had several apartment blocks built in Bourg-la-Reine. He died quite young, he was less than fifty, the best thing that could happen to him, poor man. When he died she came to live here. Fifteen years ago, that was. With all due respect, she was the same then as now, except that she could walk all right, and she was always jumping down my throat – the same with the tenants, too. Woe betide you if she saw a dog or a cat on the stairs. And if anyone had the nerve to ask for repairs to be done ...! Guess what, our building was the last in the whole district to get electricity!’

Up on the first floor, Maigret could hear footsteps and a baby crying.

'That's in Madame Bourniquel's apartment,' Madame With-All-Due-Respect told him. 'Her husband's a commercial traveller. He has a little car; he must be down in the south-west at the moment. He stays away for three months at a time. They already have four children, and there's a fifth on the way, although there's been trouble over the pram. Madame Boynet, God rest her soul, wouldn't have it left out in the corridor, so it had to be taken upstairs and down again twice a day ... look, here comes their maid putting out the rubbish.'

The timer switch had turned the electric light on, and a small maid in a white apron came past, her shape distorted by the enormous galvanized metal rubbish bucket she was holding at arm's length.

'What was I saying? Oh yes ... Will you take a glass of wine, inspector? Yes, yes, please do! I have a bottle open, Monsieur Bourniquel gave it to me, he's in the wine trade, you see. Well, one fine day, it must be about a dozen years ago, Madame Boynet's sister died in Fontenay, she was a widow too, and Madame Boynet took in her three children, two girls and a boy. Everyone around here was amazed by her generosity ... she occupied the whole of the fifth floor at the time. Monsieur Gérard, the boy, he was the first to leave. He enlisted, probably so that he could move out of his aunt's apartment. Then he married. He lives in Paris near the Bastille. He doesn't come to visit often. I've an idea things aren't going well for him.'

'Have you seen him recently?'

'Usually when he visits he waits outside until his sister comes downstairs. He's not proud. His wife's in the family way, too. He did come last week, and he went upstairs ... I think he must have needed money. He wasn't looking happy when he came down again. With all due respect, you had to be pretty spry to get anything out of his aunt ... To your very good health!'

She turned abruptly and stared at the door. The timer switch had not come on, but a slight noise could be heard, and Madame With-All-Due-Respect rose and brusquely opened the door. Maigret saw the figure of a young girl retreating.

'Wandering around on the stairs again, Mademoiselle Nouchi? Asking for trouble, if you ask me!'

She sat down again, saying peevishly, 'And me with a big building like this to look after! Those people ... they're the tenants on the fifth floor, the landlady's

neighbours. Well, as I was saying, first Monsieur Gérard left to go into the army, then his younger sister Berthe, who didn't get on with her aunt either, left home. She's a salesgirl in the Galeries Lafayette. So the old lady took advantage of that to let the other half of the apartment to those Hungarians, the Siveschis. They have two daughters, Nouchi and Potsi ... Potsi is the plump one, she's always going about half-naked. But it's a fact that Nouchi, who's no more than sixteen, isn't much better. She's everywhere in the evening, all over the place, sometimes even hanging around by the front door ...'

It seemed best to let the concierge talk on as she pleased and try to work it all out for himself. So on the first floor there was the Bourniquel family, four children, Bourniquel himself away a lot of the time, a maid, and Madame Bourniquel, who was expecting again.

On the fifth floor, the Siveschis. Maigret had met one of the family that morning, the plump and forthcoming Potsi, and he had just caught a sight of her thinner sister Nouchi.

'... Their mother never tells them off. People like that, they don't think the same way we do. Would you believe it, only last week I went upstairs with post for them? I knock on the door. "Come in," says a voice, so I open the door, thinking nothing of it, and what do I see? Madame Siveschi without a stitch of clothing on her, smoking a cigarette and looking back at me as bold as brass. And her daughters were there, too!'

'What is Monsieur Siveschi's profession?'

'His profession – oh, my dear sir, with all due respect! He comes and goes, he always has books under his arm, he's the one who does the family shopping. They're behind with the rent, but he doesn't seem to mind when the bailiff turns up. In fact you'd think it amused him. Not like poor little Monsieur Leloup – Monsieur Gaston, I call him. He keeps the bicycle shop. A good, deserving young fellow, used to be a newspaper vendor, but he bravely set up in business. He finds things difficult at the end of the month, and at those times I swear he doesn't dare to look people in the face, not even me, although ... well, he got married hardly three months ago, and what do you think? To save on their own accommodation they sleep at the back of the shop, among the tyres and spare wheels. Wait a minute – I think that little pest Nouchi ...'

It was Maigret who went to open the door. He had made out the little Hungarian girl's face behind it: her big dark eyes, her blood-red lips.

'Did you want something?' he asked.

To which, not in the least taken aback, she replied, 'Oh yes, I wanted to see you. They say you're the famous Detective Chief Inspector Maigret.'

She was looking him straight in the face. She might be thin and narrow-hipped, but she had well-shaped, pointed breasts, shown off to advantage by a blouse that fitted rather too tightly.

'Well, you've seen me now.'

'Aren't you going to question me too?'

'Do you have anything to tell me?'

'I might have.'

Outraged, Madame With-All-Due-Respect sighed and shook her head so far as her stiff neck allowed.

'Come in. So what's it about?'

The girl seemed to be very much at home in the lodge. She was triumphant. Anyone would have thought she'd won a bet that she could succeed in approaching the inspector.

'I wanted to talk to you about Monsieur Dandurand.'

'Who's he?' asked Maigret, turning to the concierge.

Indignant at Nouchi's presence, she replied, 'I've no idea what she's thinking of telling you, but with all due respect these girls tell lies as easy as breathing ... Monsieur Dandurand is a retired lawyer, a very nice gentleman, very serious, quiet and all. He occupies the whole fourth floor; he's been there for years. He goes out for his meals, he doesn't have visitors. I'm sure he won't be late coming home.'

'Well,' said Nouchi with composure, 'Monsieur Dandurand is an old pig. Every time I go downstairs he's watching for me behind his door. He's followed me out into the street several times. And last month, when I was passing his door on the landing, he tried beckoning me in.'

Madame With-All-Due-Respect threw up her arms, as if to ask whether anyone had ever heard of such horrors.

'So on Monday I went in, just out of curiosity, and he wanted to show me his collection of photographs ... there wasn't anything disgusting, I promise you. He

told me that if I went to see him now and then he'd give me ...'

'Don't believe a word she says, inspector!'

'I tell you it's true. So I told Potsi at once, and she went to look at the photographs as well. And he made her a proposition as well ...'

'What did he offer her?'

'The same as me, a wristwatch. He must have quite a stock of them. And now I can add something else. One night when I couldn't get to sleep, I heard sounds on the landing. I got up and went over to his door and I looked through the keyhole and I saw ...'

'Excuse me,' said Maigret. 'Was the light on in the stairwell, then?'

He sensed her hesitation, as she was momentarily disconcerted.

'No,' she said at last. 'But there was moonlight.'

'How could the moon be shining on the stairwell?'

'Through the skylight. There's a skylight just above the landing.'

It was true. Maigret remembered the skylight. But why had she hesitated when she mentioned light?

'Thank you, mademoiselle. You can go home now. Your parents must be worried about you.'

'They're at the cinema with my sister.'

She looked put out. Anyone might think she had hoped that Maigret would go upstairs with her!

'Is there anything else you'd like to ask me?' she suggested.

'No, that's all. Good evening.'

'Is it true that Cécile is dead?'

He did not reply to that, but closed the door behind her.

'It's a crying shame, with all due respect,' sighed the concierge. 'Another glass of wine, inspector? She's all but inviting men into her bedroom while her parents are out. Did you see the way she looked at you? I blushed for my sex!'

The cars and trucks were still going along the road. Maigret sat down again in the wicker armchair, which creaked under his weight. The concierge put more fuel in the stove, and when she sat down once more the cat jumped on her lap. It was warm in her lodge. They seemed far from anywhere. The cars and trucks were in another world, as if they were on a different planet and nothing outside the lodge was alive, except for the apartment building and the families in it.

Above the bed, Maigret saw the pear-shaped rubber device that opened the front door.

‘No one can get into the building without your knowledge, can they?’

‘It would be difficult, because there isn’t a key.’

‘Could anyone get in through the shops?’

‘The inside doors that communicate with the shops have been bricked up. Madame Boynet was frightened of thieves.’

‘Didn’t you tell me that she hadn’t left the house for several months?’

‘You must remember that she wasn’t entirely powerless. She got about the apartment, leaning on a stick. Sometimes she dragged herself out on the landing to keep an eye on the tenants or see if I was doing the cleaning properly. You didn’t hear her coming; she had her own way of creeping up on you in her slippers, and she’d put a rubber end on her walking-stick.’

‘Did she have many visitors?’

‘No one except for her nephew, Monsieur Gérard. He sometimes came. His younger sister Berthe never set foot in her aunt’s place. With all due respect, inspector, I think Berthe has a man friend. One Sunday when I went to the cemetery I met him, a very good-looking gentleman about thirty years old, and I thought he was married, but I couldn’t see whether he was wearing a wedding ring ...’

‘To sum up, Madame Boynet lived entirely alone with Cécile?’

‘Poor girl! So gentle, so devoted! Her aunt treated her like a servant, and she never complained. Now there was one who didn’t go chasing men! Not strong, either. She had a weak constitution and a delicate stomach, but that didn’t prevent her from going down five floors with the rubbish bucket and to bring up coal.’

‘So I suppose it was Cécile who took the money to the bank?’

‘What bank?’

‘I assume that when Madame Boynet got the rent money ...’

‘Oh, she wouldn’t for the world have put her money in a bank. She was too distrustful. That reminds me that at first Monsieur Bourniquel wanted to pay by cheque. “What’s all this,” she said indignantly. “You just tell the gentleman that I want proper money.” Monsieur Bourniquel stuck to his guns, and that went on

for two weeks, but in the end he had to do as she wanted. Another glass of wine, inspector? I don't often drink, but when there's a good reason to ...'

The bell rang above the bed. She rose, leaned over the eiderdown and pressed the rubber pear, telling Maigret, 'That's Monsieur Deséglise the tenant on the second floor left. He's a bus conductor. He works different hours every week.'

Sure enough, Maigret saw a man wearing the uniform cap of the Paris bus company passing along the corridor.

'There's a piano teacher on the same floor, Mademoiselle Paucot, she's an old maid. She has a pupil every hour, and when it's raining the stairs get terribly dirty. The third floor is empty. You probably saw on the door that it's to let. The last tenants were thrown out because they missed paying the rent twice running. All the same, they gave me a tip when they moved in, and they were very polite ... It's not always the rich who are most polite, is it? I'm surprised that Monsieur Dandurand isn't in yet. When I think what that girl dared to insinuate ... Girls like those two, a vicious pair they are, they'd see a man sent to prison just to make themselves seem interesting. Did you notice the way she was looking at you? A man of your age, married, in public service. I know what that's like, my husband was in public service too, he was on the railways. Ah, here's Monsieur Dandurand.'

She rose and leaned over to press the rubber pear again. Light showed both in the corridor and on the stairs. Maigret heard the soft sound of an umbrella folding, and the faint crunch of shoes being conscientiously wiped on a doormat.

'Monsieur Dandurand isn't one to get the stairs dirty.'

A dry cough. Slow, measured footsteps. The door of the concierge's lodge opened.

'Any post for me, Madame Benoit?'

'Not this evening, with all due respect to you, Monsieur Dandurand.'

He was a man of fifty with a grey complexion, grey hair, dressed entirely in black, his umbrella wet with rain. He had raised his eyes to the inspector, who in turn had frowned, because he thought he had seen that face somewhere before.

At the moment the name of Dandurand meant nothing to him, yet he was sure he knew the man. He racked his brains for the memory. Where had he seen him?

'Detective Chief Inspector Maigret, if I'm not mistaken?' asked the tenant quietly, still in the doorway. 'As it happens, inspector, I have just come from

your office. I know this is not a good time, but I also know what has happened.'

A name rose to Maigret's lips. Monsieur Charles ... he suddenly felt sure that there was some connection between that name and the man before him. What did they recall to his mind, for goodness' sake? A little bar and café, its regular customers ...

'Is there something urgent you want to tell me?'

'Well ... That's to say I thought ... If you'd take the trouble of coming up to my apartment for a moment? May I, Madame Benoit? Forgive me for asking you to climb up four floors, inspector. I have just been to Quai des Orfèvres, where I learned about that poor girl Cécile ... I admit it came as a shock.'

Maigret rose to his feet and followed Monsieur Dandurand to the stairs.

'I could see that you recognized me without remembering who I was ... We'd better hurry; the light will soon go out.'

He looked for a key in his pocket and put it into the lock. Looking up, Maigret saw the shadowy outline of Nouchi leaning over the banisters. Next moment a gob of spit fell to the landing with a dull splosh.

Monsieur Dandurand must be a chilly soul. He wore an overcoat thicker and heavier than Maigret's, and a woollen scarf wrapped round his neck. His appearance was lacklustre and not particularly attractive, in the manner of old bachelors of a certain age, and his apartment itself seemed the right setting for a man on his own who was getting on in years, with a pipe that had gone cold and bed linen that was less than spotless.

'Let me have a minute and I'll put on the light.'

His study could have belonged to a lawyer or a businessman. Dark furniture, black wooden bookshelves full of legal tomes, green filing cabinets, with periodicals and files lying on the tables.

'I think you smoke, don't you?' he asked Maigret.

Dandurand himself had a dozen pipes carefully arranged on his desk, and he filled one of them after pulling down the blind over the window.

'Don't you remember me yet? It's true that we met only twice, once at Albert's in Rue Blanche ...'

'Yes, now I do remember, Monsieur Charles ...'

'And the second time ...'

'In my office at Quai des Orfèvres, eight years ago, when I had to ask you to explain certain things. I must admit that you had answers to all my questions.'

A cold, icy smile on an icy face, where only the rather prominent nose was slightly pink.

'Please sit down. I wasn't here this morning.'

'May I ask where you were?'

'I realize, now that I know what has happened, that telling you that may be held against me. However, I am in the habit of spending some time at the Palais de Justice. A lawyer's old habits die hard, and after ...'

'After you were struck off the list of practising advocates at Fontenay-le-Comte.'

A vague gesture, as if the man were agreeing that he was right, but the matter was of little importance. The former provincial lawyer went on, 'Since then I have been spending most of my time at the Palais. Today there was a strange case in Court Thirteen, a case of extortion among members of the same family. Maître Boniface, representing the son-in-law ...'

Monsieur Dandurand, formerly Maître Dandurand, who had lived in one of the oldest town-houses in Fontenay, had a habit of cracking his fingers, which seemed to need oiling.

'Would you mind leaving your finger joints alone and telling me why you went to my office?' sighed Maigret, lighting his pipe.

'Excuse me ... when I left home at about eight this morning I had no idea of what had happened on the fifth floor. It wasn't until I was in the Palais at four in the afternoon that a friend of mine ...'

'Told you about the murder of Madame Juliette Boynet, née Cazenove, and like you a native of Fontenay-le-Comte.'

'Exactly, inspector. I came back, but I failed to find you here, and I preferred not to talk to the officer whom you had left in charge. I caught a tram, hoping to find you at Quai des Orfèvres. Our paths ought to have crossed. Inspector Cassieux, who knows me ...'

'Yes, the head of the Drug Squad, also heading up Vice, certainly ought to know the name of Monsieur Charles.'

The other man went on, as if he had failed to hear that. 'Inspector Cassieux told me about Cécile, and ...'

Maigret had risen to his feet and had tiptoed across the front hall, to which the study door still stood open. When he suddenly opened the front door of the apartment Nouchi, whose eye was glued to the keyhole, almost fell over backwards. She straightened up and, slippery as an eel, rushed to the stairs.

‘You were saying?’

‘And then I thought I had time to dine. I waited in Place Saint-Michel quite a long time for the tram, and here I am. I knew I’d find you here. I wanted to be the one to tell you that last night, between midnight and one in the morning, I was in the apartment of Madame Boynet, who was my friend and in a way my client.’ He cracked his fingers again, without thinking, and made haste to say, ‘Sorry. It’s an old habit of mine.’



4.

It was a little after ten in the evening. In front of the wardrobe mirror, beside the large bed that she had just turned down, Madame Maigret was putting her hair in curlers, sometimes holding them in place with one of the hairpins that she held between her lips. Boulevard Richard-Lenoir was deserted. Beyond Porte d'Orléans the road was also deserted, shining in the rain, but a few seconds later three, four, then six cars came driving fast along it, preceded by a huge beam of pale light.

As the car headlights passed they hardly touched Madame Boynet's house, which was too tall for its width and looked even more unattractive for having no other buildings directly beside it, so that it had a rough, unfinished appearance.

There was still a light on in Madame Piéchaud's grocery shop, where the grocer herself was sitting in front of the fire so as to save heating another room. On the other side of the front door of the apartment building the bicycle shop was in the dark, but its back door stood ajar, and light could be seen in the room behind the shop, which contained a bed and a young man polishing his shoes.

The Siveschis were at the cinema. The concierge didn't want to go to bed before Maigret had left, and to prime herself for the wait ahead of her was finishing the bottle of red wine, while explaining the situation to her cat.

On the other side of Paris, two bodies lay in refrigerated drawers in the Forensic Institute.

Monsieur Dandurand's apartment never seemed to be aired, since it was full of a mixture of odours, which in combination gave off a musty, unpleasant smell that clung to your clothes when you had left, and stayed with you for some time.

Maigret, puffing thick smoke from his pipe, avoided looking the other man in the face as much as he could.

‘Remind me, Monsieur Dandurand … if I am not mistaken, it was over a case of indecent assault that you left Fontenay, wasn’t it? Let’s see – it’s ancient history now, but someone was mentioning you at the Police Judiciaire a few weeks ago. I think you got two years.’

‘That’s correct,’ said the lawyer coldly.

Maigret huddled even deeper into his heavy overcoat, as if to protect himself from all contact. He had not taken off his hat. In spite of the impression of gruffness that he gave, he viewed most human weaknesses with considerable indulgence, but there were certain people who made him bristle and feel physically uneasy in their vicinity. Monsieur Dandurand was one of them.

This revulsion went so far that Maigret was never entirely at ease in the presence of his colleague Cassieux, who, as head of the Drug Squad, also had the Vice Squad as part of his remit.

It was Cassieux who had mentioned to him the man generally known as Monsieur Charles, a provincial lawyer involved in a nasty case involving minors. He had served a two-year prison sentence before ending up in Paris.

The case had some remarkable features and cast a strange light on human destiny. Struck off the professional register, and now living under a false name in the capital, where he was previously unknown, Dandurand still had a large enough income to indulge his tastes as he pleased. He cut a lacklustre and repellent figure as he walked around the streets for much of the day, an evasive expression in his eyes, showing a little liveliness and alacrity only when he was in pursuit of a potential victim in the crowd.

There were reports of the former lawyer being seen in the areas around Porte Saint-Martin, Boulevard Sébastopol and the Bastille. He was one of those who wait in the shadows for workshops and department stores to close, and then, with their shoulders hunched, often enter the dimly lit corridor of an establishment catering for special tastes.

He soon knew all those establishments, and in return all the madams who ran them soon knew him and would ask, ‘Good evening, Monsieur Charles, and what can I offer you today?’

He made himself at home; he liked the atmosphere of such places and came to need it daily. Soon word went round that he had been a lawyer, and now and then he was asked for advice. Finally he was allowed behind the scenes, not as a client but as a friend.

‘Did you know that the house in Rue d’Antin is for sale? Dédé’s been in difficulties and is off to South America next week. With five hundred thousand francs in cash.’

To look at Maigret, you might have thought he was dreaming. Head lowered, eyes fixed on the faded red carpet on the floor, he suddenly jumped. He thought he had heard a noise above his head. For a moment he thought it was in Madame Boynet’s apartment, and the idea of Cécile …

‘That was Nouchi,’ said Monsieur Dandurand, with his peculiarly joyless smile.

Of course, since Cécile was dead.

Cécile was dead! At this very moment the commissioner of the Police Judiciaire, out at an evening bridge party with friends, had been describing, in a few words, the broom cupboard, the body slumped against the wall and the tall shape of Maigret observing the scene.

‘And what did *he* have to say?’

‘Nothing. He just dug his hands into his pockets, but I think it was one of the hardest blows of his career. He went straight off, and I’d be surprised if he gets any sleep tonight. Poor old Maigret.’

Maigret himself knocked out his pipe against the heel of his shoe and let the ash fall to the floor.

‘You’ve been looking after Madame Boynet’s affairs, have you?’ he asked slowly, grimacing as if the words tasted bitter.

‘I knew her in Fontenay-le-Comte, and her sister too. We were almost neighbours. I met her again when I rented this apartment. She was a widow … I suppose you didn’t know her when she was alive? I won’t say she was mad, but she was certainly eccentric, and obsessed with money. She kept her entire fortune at home with her, she was so terrified of being robbed by the banks.’

‘And you took advantage of it!’

Maigret had no difficulty in imagining the man in those establishments that he frequented, closeted with the middle-aged ladies who confided in him. Monsieur

Dandurand had then climbed another rung on the ladder and got to know the owners. He must have lost no time in meeting them at the bars in Montmartre where they gathered in the evening to play cards.

And so Monsieur Charles Dandurand, the Fontenay lawyer, had become Monsieur Charles, the adviser and colleague of certain gentlemen who had the utmost confidence in him, because his knowledge of the criminal code was extremely useful to them.

‘The advantage was hers, inspector.’

His long, pale hands, their backs covered with hairs, were fiddling with the pipes on his table. Tufts of grey hair also grew in his nostrils.

‘Haven’t you ever heard of old Juliette?’ he asked. ‘Of course, you’re solely concerned with the work of the homicide squad. But your colleague Cassieux ... well, it began with that establishment in Rue d’Antin when it came up for sale. I mentioned it to Madame Boynet – I always called her Juliette; we used to play together as children. Juliette bought it. A year later I acquired the Paradise in Béziers for her, one of the best houses in France.’

‘Did she know what sort of investments you were making for her?’

‘Listen to me, inspector, I’ve known misers in my time – a provincial lawyer finds that all kinds of people cross his path – but their avarice was nothing by comparison to Juliette’s. She had a positively mystical love of money. Just ask the underworld bosses. They’ll confirm that Juliette was the sleeping partner in the ownership of a great many houses. Would you like to know the figures?’

He got up and went over to a safe fixed to the wall, took out of it a notebook of dubious appearance and moistened his unattractive fingers to help him turn the pages better.

‘Last year I gave Juliette the sum of five hundred and ninety thousand francs in banknotes. A profit of five hundred and ninety thousand francs ...’

‘And she kept all that cash in her apartment?’

‘I have every reason to think so, since she never went out any more and she wouldn’t have handed such sums over to her niece. Oh, I can guess what you’re thinking, I know that my situation appears in a bad light, but I assure you that you’re wrong, inspector. I have never cheated anyone out of so much as a centime. Ask the gentlemen I meet in the course of this business; they’re not the

kind to put up with any irregularity. Everyone will tell you that Monsieur Charles behaves perfectly correctly. Tobacco?’

Maigret pushed away the tobacco pouch offered to him and took his own out of his pocket.

‘No, thank you.’

‘Just as you like. I’m putting you in the picture – coming clean, as our underworld friends might say.’

For a man who had spent half his life in the prim and proper society of Fontenay, he had an odd smile on his face when he spoke of the underworld.

‘Juliette had her obsessions, as I was saying. The idea that the nature of her investments might be discovered some day ... and remember that she never saw anyone and no one was bothered about her ... but all the same, she took ridiculous, positively touching precautions. During the six months and more since she last left her apartment, I had to go and see her at home. How do you think I had to act on those days?’

Footsteps on the stairs. The Siveschis, on their way home, could be heard talking vociferously in Hungarian, and as they reached the floor above their conversation turned to argument.

‘Every morning the tenants’ newspapers are left at the lodge downstairs. The concierge sorts them into the proper pigeon-holes along with the post. When I collected my paper, I had to trace a cross in pencil on Juliette’s, and then poor Cécile, who knew nothing about these arrangements, came to pick it up a little later. At midnight I would go upstairs very quietly, to find Juliette waiting for me on the other side of the door, leaning on her walking-stick.’

And the whole of the Police Judiciaire had laughed at Cécile when she talked about objects changing place on certain nights!

‘Didn’t the niece ever wake up?’

‘Cécile? No, her aunt made sure she didn’t. If you’ve searched the apartment, and I suppose you have, you must have found tubes of bromide in a drawer. On evenings when she expected to see me, Juliette saw to it that Cécile slept very soundly, and ... oh, do forgive me; I haven’t offered you a drink yet. What would you like?’

‘Nothing, thank you.’

'I can see what you think, but you're on the wrong track, inspector. You don't have to believe me when I tell you that I'd be incapable of killing so much as a chicken, and the sight of blood makes me feel faint ...'

'Madame Boynet was strangled.'

The former lawyer was momentarily taken aback, as if upset by this argument. He looked at his pale hands.

'I wouldn't be capable of that, either. Besides, it wouldn't have been in my interests to ...'

'Tell me, Monsieur Dandurand, how much money, in your opinion, did Madame Boynet have in her apartment?'

'About eight hundred thousand francs.'

'Do you know where she hid it?'

'She never told me – but knowing her as I did, I should think she never moved far from it. It must have been within her reach, and I'd guess that she slept with her fortune, so to speak.'

'All the same, nothing has been found. She must have had papers, property deeds, but they've disappeared from her desk. What time did you come down to this apartment last night?'

'Between one and one thirty in the morning.'

'According to the forensic pathologist, Madame Boynet was killed at about two in the morning. The concierge says that no one entered the building at that time. One more question: during your visit was there anything to suggest that Cécile wasn't asleep?'

'No, nothing.'

'Think hard. *Are you sure that you didn't leave anything in the apartment that could lead someone to suspect you of having been there?*'

Monsieur Charles thought, unflustered. 'I don't see what ...'

'Those are all the questions I have. Of course, I must ask you not to leave Paris, or even to move far from this apartment.'

'I understand.'

Maigret was already in the front hall.

'Oh, forgive me. I almost forgot. Do you often see friends here?' He emphasized the word *friends*.

‘None of them has ever been in this house. I am a prudent man myself, inspector. I don’t take it to the same lengths as poor Juliette; I’m not obsessed. My friends, as you call them, write to me at a post office box address. For good reasons, they did not know Madame Boynet’s address or even her real name, indeed to such a point that many of them thought Juliette didn’t really exist, and was only a story that I used in order to ...’

There were more footsteps on the stairs, and the breathless voice of the concierge. ‘Stop, Monsieur Gérard!’ Then she called, ‘Detective chief inspector! Sir!’

Maigret opened the door, and as the light went out at that very moment he activated the timer switch. An agitated young man whom he had not seen before was standing in front of him, trembling.

‘Where’s my sister?’ he asked, looking at Maigret with wild eyes.

‘This is Monsieur Gérard,’ explained Madame Benoit. ‘He came bursting in like a madman. I told him that Mademoiselle Cécile ...’

‘Be good enough to go back into your apartment, please, Monsieur Dandurand,’ said Maigret.

The Siveschis’ door had opened, and another door on the floor below was opening as well.

‘Follow me, Monsieur Gérard. You can go back downstairs now, Madame Benoit.’

The inspector had the key to the dead woman’s apartment in his pocket. Letting the young man go ahead of him, he bolted the door after them.

‘Have you only just heard that ...’

‘Is it true? Cécile is dead?’

‘Who told you?’

‘The concierge.’

The specialists from Criminal Records had turned the apartment upside down; they had searched all the drawers and cupboards and left the contents scattered willy-nilly.

‘My sister?’

‘Cécile is dead, yes.’

Gérard was in such a nervous condition that he couldn’t shed tears. He was looking round as if unable to understand what had happened, and his expression

of dismay made him a sad sight.

‘It’s impossible ... where is she?’

‘Not here. Calm down ... wait a moment.’

He remembered seeing a bottle of rum in a cupboard, found it and offered it to the young man. ‘Drink some of this. Now, how did you find out that ...?’

‘I was at the café when ...’

‘Excuse me, let me ask you some questions. It will be quicker that way. What were you doing this afternoon?’

‘I went to three different addresses. I’m looking for a job.’

‘What kind of job?’

Gérard grimaced. ‘Any job! My wife is having our baby in a few days’ time. The landlord has given us notice, and I ...’

‘Did you go home for dinner?’

‘No, I was at the café ...’

Only then did Maigret realize that Gérard was drunk, or rather he had had more to drink than was good for him. ‘Were you looking for a job at this café?’

A furious, hate-filled stare. ‘You too, of course! Like my wife! You don’t know what it’s like, chasing about in vain from morning to evening! Do you know what I did last week, three nights running? You don’t, do you? It’s all the same to you! Well, I was unloading vegetables at Les Halles, just to earn enough to buy food. I was hoping to meet someone who’d promised me work at the café this evening.’

‘Who?’

‘I don’t know his name. A tall redhead, he deals with wireless sets.’

‘What was the café?’

‘You suspect me of murdering my aunt, don’t you?’

He was trembling from head to foot, and looked as if he might be about to charge at the inspector.

‘The Canon de la Bastille, if you want to know. I live in Rue du Pas-de-la-Mule. The redhead never turned up. I didn’t want to go home without ...’

‘Haven’t you dined?’

‘What’s that got to do with you? There was a newspaper lying about on a table. I read the small ads first, same as usual. You don’t know what it’s like, reading the small ads and telling yourself ... Well, in short ...’ He made a

gesture, as if dismissing a nightmare. ‘I suddenly saw my aunt’s name on the third page. I didn’t take it in at first. It was only a few lines. “Landlady in Bourg-la-Reine found strangled in her bed,” said the headline. And under it: “Madame Juliette Boynet, owner of a property in Bourg-la-Reine, has been ...”’

‘What time was this?’

‘I don’t know. It’s ages since I had a watch. Maybe half past nine? Anyway, I rushed home. I told Hélène ...’

‘That’s your wife?’

‘Yes. I told her my aunt was dead and I caught the bus.’

‘Had you been drinking meanwhile?’

‘Only a little glass to buck me up. Anyway, I wondered why Cécile hadn’t told me.’

‘I suppose you will be your aunt’s heir?’

‘With my two sisters, yes ... I caught the tram at Le Châtelet and ... but Cécile, why was Cécile killed? The concierge has just told me ...’

‘Cécile was killed because she knew who the murderer was,’ said Maigret slowly.

Unable to calm down, the young man reached out his hand to the bottle of rum.

‘No, you’ve had enough,’ said the inspector. ‘What you need now is a cup of strong coffee.’

‘What are you insinuating?’

He was aggressive, looking at his questioner as if he were an enemy.

‘I hope you don’t think I murdered my aunt and my sister?’ he suddenly cried in a fury.

Maigret made the mistake of not replying. He wasn’t really thinking about that. He had been letting his mind wander, as he sometimes did, or more precisely he had been bringing the scene around him to life: the same apartment, but a few years earlier, the aunt with her obsessions, the teenage Cécile, her sister Berthe still a child with her hair worn loose, Gérard wanting to enlist so as to escape the atmosphere here ...

He started as the young man grabbed him by the lapels of his overcoat, shouting, ‘Answer me! You think ... you really think I ...’

He smelled strongly of alcohol. Maigret stepped back and caught hold of both Gérard's wrists.

'Take it easy, young man,' he murmured. 'Take it easy.'

He was forgetting his own strength, and the other man groaned as he felt the inspector's iron grip.

'You're hurting me.'

Tears had finally sprung into his eyes.



5.

Was there some kind of epidemic in Bourg-la-Reine? Maigret could have resigned himself to that, but he couldn't get the question out of his mind. No doubt the undertaker's man would have replied that deaths occur all at once, that you can go for five days without any call for a first-class or a second-class hearse, and then be suddenly overwhelmed by the demand for them.

This morning the undertaker's services were in great demand, so much so that one of the horses pulling Juliette Boynet's hearse was not a proper undertaker's horse at all and tried ten times to break into a trot, thus lending a jerky appearance to the cortège and setting a fast pace that was incompatible with the dignity of a funeral.

A man called Monfils, an insurance agent from Luçon, seemed to be in charge of the ceremony. As soon as the murder of Juliette Boynet had been announced in the press, he set off for Paris, already in deep mourning garb (which no doubt dated from a preceding funeral), and he was to be seen everywhere, tall, thin and pale, his nose red from a head cold that he had caught on the train.

He was Juliette Boynet's first cousin.

'I know what I'm talking about, inspector,' he told Maigret. 'It was always settled that she would be leaving us something, and she agreed to be our eldest son's godmother. I'm sure there must be a will. If it hasn't been found, it may be that other people had an interest in disposing of it. Incidentally, I shall appear as plaintiff in any trial.'

He had insisted on a proper burial, leaving from the home of the deceased, where a chapel of rest was to be set up in the fifth-floor apartment.

'In this family,' he pronounced, 'we are not in the habit of burying our dead in any old fashion.'

On that same morning, he had gone to the railway station to meet his wife, who was also in deep mourning, and their five children, who were to follow the procession in descending order of size, holding their hats. Five boys, all with fair hair too unruly to submit to being combed.

This was the time of day when traffic on the main road was especially dense. In particular, there was an uninterrupted line of vans coming back from Les Halles. It was clear weather, the sun shining, but not strongly, the air cold and biting; the mourners who had come were stamping their feet and digging their hands in their pockets to keep warm.

Maigret had not slept the night before. He and Lucas had been watching his gang of Poles from the room in Rue de Birague. He had been feeling morose and irritable ever since the death of Cécile three days earlier. The Poles, who prevented him from devoting his mind entirely to the Bourg-la-Reine case, were really beginning to annoy him. At seven in the morning he made up his mind.

'You stay here,' he told Lucas. 'I'm going to nab the first of them to leave their quarters.'

'Be careful, sir,' said Lucas. 'They're armed.'

Maigret shrugged his shoulders, went into the Hôtel des Arcades and stationed himself near the staircase. A quarter of an hour later, the door of the Poles' room opened. A giant of a man emerged and began coming downstairs. Maigret pounced on him from behind, and the two men rolled over and over until they reached the ground floor, where the inspector got to his feet after handcuffing his adversary. On hearing his whistle, Torrence came running.

'Take him to headquarters,' Maigret told him. 'I'll leave it to you to grill him ... until he talks, understand? I want him squealing loud and long.'

And after knocking the dust off his clothing, he went to eat croissants, washed down with coffee, at the bar of the nearby café.

Everyone in the Police Judiciaire knew that it was better not to cross him at such times, when even Madame Maigret didn't venture to ask when he would be home for lunch or dinner.

Now he was there on the pavement outside the Bourg-la-Reine apartment building, leaning on the window of the grocery shop and smoking his pipe with

angry little puffs. The case had been in the newspapers, and there were a good many curious onlookers, not to mention half a dozen journalists and some photographers. The two hearses stood outside the building, Juliette Boynet's in front, Cécile's behind it, and the tenants of the apartments, on the initiative of Madame With-All-Due-Respect, who claimed that it was the least they could do, had clubbed together to buy a wreath.

In Memory Of Our Much-Lamented Landlady.

Outside stood the Monfils couple and their sons, representing the family of Juliette Boynet, née Cazenove, another group representing the family of her dead husband, the Boynets and the Machepieds, who lived in Paris.

There was evidently no love lost between the two groups, who glared at one another. Boynet and Machepied both claimed that they had been robbed, saying that at the time of her husband's death the old woman had promised that part of her fortune would return to his family some day. They had presented themselves at Police Judiciaire headquarters as a delegation the day before, and the commissioner had seen them, for they were persons of some importance in the city, one of them a municipal councillor.

'Those gentlemen say there's a will, Maigret,' the commissioner had said, 'and when I tell them that the apartment has been searched, they won't listen.'

They bore Maigret a grudge, they bore Monfils a grudge, they bore Juliette a grudge. In short, all gathered together for the funeral considered that they had been robbed, first and foremost Gérard Pardon, who didn't talk to anyone and seemed more nervous than ever.

Poverty had prevented him from wearing full mourning, and he had no overcoat on, only an old khaki raincoat with a black armband on one sleeve.

His sister Berthe stood beside him, worrying because he was so agitated. She was a plump girl, pretty and stylish, and she had not thought it necessary to exchange her cherry-red hat for one of a darker colour.

Monsieur Dandurand was also present, among four or five expensively clad gentlemen whose fingers were laden with rings and who had arrived in a flashy car with a twelve-cylinder engine. The Siveschi family were there too, except for the mother, who wasn't up and dressed yet. Madame Piéchaud the grocer had left Madame Benoit in charge of her shop for a moment, giving her time to go upstairs and sprinkle the coffins with holy water.

The funeral director, who was nervous because there was to be another burial at eleven o'clock, was not standing with any of these distinct groups, but was trying in vain to find out who officially represented the family. He was particularly anxious about the photographers. 'Not yet, please, gentlemen. At least wait until everyone is here!'

It would be terrible if the papers were to print a picture of such a disorganized funeral procession!

Someone pointed out Maigret, who didn't seem to notice. As the biers with the two coffins were being brought downstairs, he touched the shoulder of Gérard Pardon, who jumped.

'Give me a moment, will you?' he whispered, drawing the young man aside.

'What do you want this time?'

'Your wife must have told you that I visited her yesterday when you were out.'

'Are you telling me that you searched our lodgings?' He laughed; it was a nervous, painful little snigger. 'Did you find what you were looking for?'

When the inspector said, 'Yes,' Gérard looked at him in alarm.

'You see, at a moment when your wife's back was turned, my attention was attracted by a pot plant. I'm a bit of a gardener in my spare time, and something about that plant pot didn't look quite natural to me. Sure enough, this is what I found in the soil, which had been freshly turned over.'

And he showed the young man a small key held in the hollow of his hand – a key that would open the front door of Juliette Boynet's apartment.

'Strange, isn't it?' he went on. 'Such a coincidence ... Back in my office a little later, I found a locksmith waiting for me, a locksmith who lives and works only a hundred metres from here. He wanted to tell me that he had made a similar key hardly two weeks ago.'

'So what does that prove?'

Gérard was trembling, looking desperately round as if in search of aid, and his glance fell on his sister's coffin as the black-clad men were hoisting it into the hearse.

'Are you going to arrest me?'

'I don't know yet.'

'Well, if you questioned the locksmith you must know who gave me that key.'

Cécile had given it to him; the locksmith's statement left no doubt about that.

'On Monday 25 September,' he had said, 'a young woman of about thirty came to my workshop with a Yale key to the front door of an apartment, asking me to make her a copy of it. I asked her to leave me the key as a model, but she said she needed it because it was the only key to that lock she had, so I took an imprint. She came back for the second key next day and paid me twelve francs seventy-five. It was only when I read in the newspapers about Cécile Pardon, who had just been murdered, and particularly when I remembered her slight squint, that I ...'

The funeral procession was setting off; the master of ceremonies hurried over to Gérard, gesticulating, and Maigret said in an undertone, 'We can talk about this later.'

Gérard and his sister Berthe were placed right behind the hearses, but they had not gone ten metres before the Monfils family, competing with them for precedence, moved up to walk beside the brother and sister.

The Boynets and Machepieds, who were not going to any trouble to pretend they felt deep grief, followed more discreetly, discussing the inheritance, and after them came Monsieur Dandurand, with the gentlemen who wore such large rings, one of whom brought up the rear of the procession, driving their car.

From the first the pace was much too fast, because of the horse with a mind of its own. On the other hand, when everyone had to turn left for the church, thus crossing the main road, there was a terrible shambles, and the traffic was held up for several minutes, including three trams one after another.

Gérard's wife had not come, heavily pregnant as she was. Her baby would be due in a week's time at the most. Maigret had spent an hour with her the day before, in the couple's lodgings: a two-roomed apartment in Rue du Pas-de-la-Mule, above a butcher's shop.

She must be barely twenty-three years old, and the resignation of a poverty-stricken housewife could already be seen on her face, which had lost the bloom of youth. You could tell that she was struggling to make those two rooms habitable, with insufficient financial means. A number of items must already have gone on their way to the pawnbroker's, and Maigret noticed that the gas had been turned off.

'Gérard has never had any luck,' she sighed, without resentment. 'Yet he's such a nice man, and much more intelligent than many others who have good jobs. Perhaps he's *too* intelligent?'

Her name was Hélène. Her father worked in the indirect taxation office, and she dared not tell him the household's real situation but let him think Gérard was working and the two of them were happy.

'You found him a little embittered, I expect, but put yourself in his place. Everything has gone against him for so long. He chases round all day, answering the small ads ... Oh, I hope at least you don't suspect him, inspector. He could never do anything the least little bit dishonest ... Maybe it's because he's over-scrupulous that he's getting nowhere. You know, in his last job, when he was working for a firm selling vacuum cleaners, there was a theft, and Gérard suspected one of his colleagues, but he didn't say anything. And when his boss started asking *him* questions, as if he were accusing him, Gérard left rather than give his colleague away ... Oh yes, you can look round our lodgings. You won't find anything interesting, only bills.'

And there was the pot plant standing on the window-sill! Maigret had noticed that while the soil looked freshly turned, the geranium in the pot had died some time ago. So he took advantage of the moment when Hélène wasn't looking ...

Now, with his hands in his pockets, he was walking along the pavement, to one side of the procession, which allowed him to smoke his pipe. Bringing up the rear, he saw the two Siveschi girls, Nouchi and Potsi, who were acting as if they were at a party and wanted to see everything there was to be seen. Madame With-All-Due-Respect had handed over her lodge to a woman neighbour for an hour (she was unaware that Maigret had stationed a police officer opposite the building). She was going to the church but not to the cemetery because of her stiff neck; she was afraid of draughts.

Suddenly the column stopped, a halt that was not part of the programme. The mourners craned their necks and stood on tiptoe to see what was going on.

Juliette Boynet and Cécile were out of luck. Another funeral procession, this one late while theirs was early, was coming out of a road intersecting their own and making for the church. The horses pawed the road with their hooves. Some of the men left the procession for a moment to go into a little café for a quick drink and were seen wiping their mouths as they came out again.

Organ music was heard. Behind them, cars were driving along the Route Nationale 20. Inside the church, the priest was giving the last congregation his blessing at high speed, and the double doors opened for the next funeral service.

‘Et ne nos inducas in temptationem ...’

The master of ceremonies, in his cocked hat, was walking up and down his procession, herding them like a sheepdog.

‘Sed libera nos a malo ...’

‘Amen!’

The new party of mourners went into the church before the last party had finished going out. There was room for only one of the coffins, Juliette Boynet’s, under the catafalque. Cécile’s was placed on the paving stones behind it, and the priest went on chanting.

‘Libera nos Domine ...’

Shoes shuffled on the floor, chairs were pushed back. Fresh air flooded in through the open door, beyond which the sunny street could be seen. Gérard, in the front row, kept turning his head. Was it Maigret he was looking for? Charles Dandurand’s companions were acting very correctly, putting 100-franc notes in the collection. Berthe, in her cherry-red hat, was keeping an eye on her brother as if she were afraid he would do something stupid.

‘Pater noster ...’

Everyone jumped, because a news agency photographer had had no compunction about using a magnesium flash.

Maigret, buttoned up in his big overcoat with its velvet collar, his shoulder against a stone pillar, was moving his lips as if in prayer. Perhaps he was indeed praying for poor Cécile, who had waited so long for him in the Aquarium at the police headquarters on Quai des Orfèvres?

For the last three days he had been inclined to snap at anyone who ventured to speak to him as he walked along the corridor of the Police Judiciaire building, a bulky, almost threatening figure, mulling over angry thoughts as he chewed the stem of his pipe.

‘Is something the matter?’ the commissioner had asked him the day before.

His only reply had been a glance so heavy with meaning that it signified more than any verbal response.

‘Don’t worry, old friend,’ said his boss. ‘Once you begin to unravel the case ...’

The stained glass windows showing the four evangelists were set aflame by the sunlight, and Maigret, for no real reason, fixed his gaze on St Luke in particular, whom the artist had shown with a brown, square-cut beard.

‘Et ne nos inducas in temptationem ...’

Was another party of mourners waiting outside, making the priest rattle off his absolution so fast? The horse that wasn’t used to funeral ceremonies kept whinnying, and the sound echoed under the vaulted roof like a cheerful call to life.

Why, without telling her aunt, had Cécile ordered a second key to the door of the apartment two weeks earlier? And had she given that key to her brother? Because if so ...

He could still see her, sitting motionless in the waiting room, her handbag on her lap, capable of staying there for hours in the same position.

Maigret remembered saying, ‘Either she followed someone she knew, someone she trusted, or she was made to think that she was being taken to see me ...’

Her brother?

Troubled, the inspector looked away from Gérard, who was staring at him, and whom Berthe was trying to calm down with her hand on his arm.

‘This way, gentlemen. Hurry up, please.’

There was a great commotion at the cemetery too. The mourners had soon crossed the part of it full of family vaults and stone tombs. They reached the new plots, clay rectangles with wooden crosses above them. The hearses could get no further here. The two coffins were carried on biers, and had to go in Indian file along the narrow paths.

‘When may I see you, inspector?’

‘Where are you staying?’

‘At the Hôtel du Centre, on Boulevard Montparnasse.’

It was Monfils, who had caught hold of Maigret in passing.

‘I’m sure I can be there later today.’

‘Wouldn’t you rather I came to your office?’

‘I don’t know when I’ll be there.’

And Maigret went over to Berthe, who had been briefly separated from her brother by the crowd.

'I don't think you should leave him alone,' he told her. 'He's in a very agitated state of mind. Try to get him to go home with you, and I'll see him there.'

She lowered her lashes to show her consent. She was pretty, and her plump little figure dispelled any ideas of tragic drama.

'Tell me, inspector ...'

Maigret turned, to see one of the men who had accompanied Dandurand.

'Could we have a few words with you? There's a quiet bistro at the way out of the cemetery.'

A deacon, followed by a choirboy who looked as if he were galloping as fast as his little legs would carry him and impeded by the black cassock, from which heavy, hobnailed shoes emerged, leaned over the grave, moved his lips, turned the pages of his missal and threw the first spadeful of earth into the pit that had been dug. Gérard and the Monfils cousin were both putting out a hand, ready to throw in the next. Heads came between them and Maigret, preventing him from seeing who won the day.

Suddenly the gathering broke up. Nouchi, in passing, stared boldly at the inspector. She looked on the point of asking for his autograph, as if he were a film star.

When Maigret opened the door of the bistro that stood next to the depot where the tombstones were stored, Monsieur Dandurand's friends, already sitting round a table, all rose together.

'Forgive me for troubling you ... what will you drink, inspector? Waiter! The same for the inspector, please.'

Charles Dandurand was there, clean-shaven and grey, as grey as the tombstones.

'Sit down, inspector. We would have gone to your office, but perhaps this is a better place.'

The whole group of big bosses who met in the evenings at Albert's bar was there, as calm as if they were round the green baize table of a board meeting.

'To your good health! It's hardly worth the trouble of giving you a sales talk, is it? Inspector Cassieux knows us, and he knows we're on the level.'

The car with the twelve-cylinder engine was standing at the door, with little boys admiring the chrome trim, which sparkled in the sun.

‘It’s about poor Juliette, of course. You’ll be aware that the law, on the pretext of morality, ignores the negotiations that take place in our line of business. We have to manage those for ourselves. Now, old Juliette had a stake in ten or so houses at least, leaving aside those in Béziers and Rue d’Antin, which belonged to her outright. Monsieur Charles will tell you that we have held a meeting here to discuss the best thing to do ...’

The others gravely nodded. Monsieur Charles’s pale, hairy hands were flat on the table.

‘The same again, waiter! Do you know what the interests concerned amount to, inspector? A little more than three thousand grand, that’s to say three million. Well, we don’t want to take risks. Apparently there’s no will. Monsieur Charles isn’t anxious to have any trouble. So we wanted to ask you what ought to be done. Two people have already been trying to find whatever there is to be found. First a man called Monfils; you saw him with his boys today. Then the girl’s brother, young Gérard. Both of them would like to lay hands on some cash. We’re not saying no, but we need to know who it belongs to. Well, that’s the situation. You can’t close down a profitable joint just because ...’

The speaker suddenly got to his feet and took the inspector by the sleeve. ‘Come this way for a moment, would you?’ And he led Maigret into another room.

‘I am what I am, of course. However, there’s one thing I can confirm, and my friends there will say so too: Monsieur Charles has always been on the level. The old lady’s certificates have disappeared, but we’re not the sort to quibble about signatures. I said three million; it may be more. With or without papers, no one’s going to touch it without your say-so.’

‘I’ll have to put this to my superior officers,’ remarked Maigret.

‘One moment ... there’s something else I want to say, and this time my friends must hear it too.’

They returned to the other room.

‘Well, it’s like this, inspector. We have decided to make you an offer: we will offer twenty thousand to you for finding whatever nasty piece of work did old

Juliette in. Are you happy with that? Is it enough? We've arranged everything, and Monsieur Charles will give you the cash.'

The former lawyer thought that the moment had come for him to take a wallet stuffed with banknotes out of his pocket.

'Not now,' the inspector interrupted. 'As I said, I must put this to my superiors. Waiter, my bill, please ... Yes ... excuse me, I insist!'

And he paid for his drinks, while the spokesman for the group growled, 'Just as you like, but we'd rather you didn't!'

Maigret left the bistro with the warmth of two aperitifs in his chest. He hadn't gone ten steps before he stopped in his tracks.

Gérard, looking more strung up than ever, was facing him, and his sister Berthe gave the inspector a look conveying that she had done her best to take him away with her, as he could see for himself, but there was nothing to be done about it.

As for her brother, who had somehow got hold of drink and whose breath smelled of alcohol, he said in a truculent tone, his lips quivering, 'Now then, inspector, I hope you're going to give me an explanation.'

The grave-diggers had left; other graves needed their attention, and there were still only a few spadefuls of yellowish clay on top of Cécile's coffin.



6.

‘In you go, my child!’

It was not like Maigret, but without realizing it he felt the need to place his hand on the curve of Berthe Pardon’s shoulder. Many mature, middle-aged men habitually treated her like that, in a paternal manner, it wasn’t unusual. The inspector must have done it clumsily, for the girl turned to him in surprise, and while he was slightly embarrassed, Berthe seemed to be saying: You as well!

Her brother had been the first to enter the apartment; the undertaker’s staff who had prepared it as a chapel of rest for the dead women had left only a little earlier, for Maigret and his companions had met them, with their equipment, at the foot of the stairs.

It was Maigret’s turn to go in, but he heard a voice with a slight foreign accent, quite close to him, saying, ‘I’d like a word with you, inspector.’

He saw that it was Nouchi, whose funeral wear had been a black suit too small and too tight for her, no doubt bought a year or so earlier, before she began her adolescent development, which made her look even more ambivalent.

‘In a little while,’ he said crossly, because he did not feel indulgent towards her and her effrontery.

‘But it’s very important.’

Maigret, entering the late Juliette Boynet’s apartment and closing the door behind him, growled, ‘Important or not, it will have to wait.’

Since he had Gérard here, he was going to finish talking to him first, and he was not put out by Berthe’s presence. The old woman’s home was a better place for this conversation than his office at Quai des Orfèvres. The atmosphere was

already taking effect on Gérard's nerves. He was looking, with a kind of anxiety, at the walls, from which the black draperies had just been removed, and the lingering smell of the candles and flowers was like the musty odour of death.

Berthe Pardon was as much at her ease as in her department at the Galeries Lafayette, or in the restaurant with its set menu where she ate her meals. Her round and still-childish face expressed serenity, contentment and what some would have called the peace of a clear conscience. She represented exactly the kind of young girl that people like to imagine, still untouched not only by sin but by the mere idea of sin.

'Sit down, children,' said Maigret, taking his pipe out of his pocket.

Gérard was too tense to take one of the sitting-room armchairs. Quite unlike his sister, he was constantly on the alert, a prey to stormy thoughts, and his eyes never rested long on the same spot.

'You might as well admit that you suspect me of killing my aunt and my sister,' he said, his lips trembling. 'Because I'm poor, because I've always had bad luck. It's nothing to you to bother my wife, who's expecting a baby and isn't very strong anyway. Taking advantage of my absence to search our lodgings! You deliberately went there when I was out.'

'Exactly,' said Maigret, lighting his pipe and looking at the portrait photos hanging on the walls.

'Because you didn't have a search warrant! Because you knew I wouldn't have let you do it!'

'No, no ...'

Berthe took off the marten fur stole, too long and too narrow, that she had been wearing round her neck, and the inspector noticed how white and plump her throat was.

'And did you think of asking that two-faced Monfils where he was on the night of the crime? I'm sure you didn't, because after all, he's a ...'

'I'm going to ask him that very question this afternoon.'

'In that case you can ask him whether my sisters and I haven't been robbed all along.'

He pointed to the portrait of a woman, a slightly faded enlargement.

'That's my mother,' he said. 'She was like Cécile. Not just physically, her nature too. You wouldn't understand. She was always humble, always afraid that

she was in the way, was taking more than her proper share. She had an almost pathological need for self-sacrifice. My poor sister was the same, and she lived her whole life like a domestic servant. Isn't that so, Berthe?'

'Yes, it is,' the girl agreed. 'Aunt Juliette treated her as a skivvy.'

'What the inspector doesn't know ...'

Maigret almost smiled, because there was one thing, in any case, that the furious young man before him couldn't suspect, which was that he himself suffered from an inferiority complex. He sometimes wanted to shake off the sense of humility that troubled him, and then he became aggressive, going too far in the opposite direction and facing others defiantly.

'My mother was the elder sister. She was twenty-four when my aunt met Boynet, who was rich. They were orphaned, living in Fontenay on a pension that their parents had left them. So this is what happened: if she was going to marry Boynet, my aunt needed a dowry, and she persuaded my mother to give up her part of their inheritance. Everyone in the family knows about it, and if Monfils isn't a liar he'll confirm that. It meant that, thanks to my mother, Juliette made a good marriage.'

"I'll make it up to you one day," she said. "You can be sure I'll never forget this. Once I'm married ..."

'But nothing of the sort happened. Once she was married she didn't think her sister good enough to visit her in the new surroundings where she lived now, and my poor mother went to work in a shop in Fontenay. She married the department manager there – he was already in bad health, and she went on working.

'Then we were born, and my aunt only grudgingly agreed to be Cécile's godmother. Do you know how much she sent her as a First Communion present? A hundred francs! When her husband was already the owner of a dozen apartment buildings.

"Never fear, Émilie," she wrote to my mother. "If anything bad happens to you I'll look after the children."

'My father was the first to die, and my mother followed him soon. Aunt Juliette was a widow by then and had just gone to live in this apartment, but at that time she occupied the whole fifth floor.'

'It was her cousin Monfils who brought us here from Fontenay. You were too young at the time to remember that, Berthe.'

“Oh, my goodness, how thin they are!” Aunt Juliette cried when she saw us. “Anyone would think my poor sister didn’t give them anything to eat.”

‘Then she started criticizing everything about us: our clothes, our underwear, our shoes – she said they were too good for us – our manners ...

‘Cécile, already in her teens, was treated like a domestic servant from the first. As for me, my aunt was going to apprentice me to some trade or other, on the grounds that the poor ought to be manual workers. If I came home with my trousers torn I never heard the end of it. I was ungrateful, I didn’t realize how much was being done for me and my sisters, I was sure to come to a bad end.

‘Cécile suffered without a word of protest. The maid was dismissed, because my sister could do all the work. Would you like to see how we were dressed?’

He went to find a photograph standing on a piece of furniture. It showed the three siblings: Cécile in black looking as Maigret had known her, with her hair pulled back in a plain style; Berthe, young and chubby in a dress too long for her age; and Gérard, aged fourteen or fifteen, in a suit that had certainly not been made for him.

‘When I decided to join the army, my aunt didn’t send me so much as a five-franc piece at the end of the month. My comrades got parcels, cigarettes ... All my life I’ve been seeing other people do well.’

‘How old were you when you left your aunt’s household, mademoiselle?’ asked Maigret, turning to the girl.

‘Sixteen,’ she replied. ‘I went off on my own to ask a large store for a job. They wanted to know my age, so I told them I was eighteen.’

‘When I got married,’ Gérard said, taking up his story again, ‘my aunt sent me a silver cake slice. One day, when we were very hard up, I wanted to sell it, and it fetched thirty francs. Cécile got hardly enough to eat, yet our aunt was a rich woman. And now that she’s dead it’s me you blame.’

He was a pathetic sight, such was his bitterness and resentment.

‘Were you ever tempted to do away with your aunt?’ asked Maigret, in a calm tone that made the girl start with surprise.

‘If I say yes, you’ll come to the conclusion that I strangled her, won’t you? Well, yes, I often wanted to, but I’m afraid I didn’t feel brave enough, so now you can think whatever you like. Arrest me if you want to – that will be only one more injustice.’

Berthe looked at the time on her little wristwatch. ‘Do you need me any longer, inspector?’

‘Why do you ask?’

‘It’s midday, and I was going to meet my friend. He’ll be waiting for me opposite the store.’ She still seemed virginal, even in speaking of her lover. ‘You have my address: 22 Rue Ordener. I’m nearly always at home after seven in the evening. What are you going to do with Gérard? He’s always been like this; just take no notice. Do you need money, Gérard? Give Hélène my love, and tell her I’ll come and see her tomorrow or the day after tomorrow. The store said I could have three days off.’

‘So this is what we’ve come to,’ concluded Gérard. ‘Her friend is a married man! If my poor mother knew ...’

‘Tell me, why did Cécile give you that key?’

‘If you really want to know, I’ll tell you. Too bad for you! She gave it to me because the police don’t do their job properly! Because when poor people turn to the police they don’t even get a hearing! Cécile went to see you several times – I’m sure you won’t dare to deny it. She told you she was frightened, she told you there were things that she didn’t understand going on in the apartment. And what did you do? You laughed at her. You twice sent a useless junior officer who did nothing but walk past the building. And when Cécile went back to your office because she was sure there had been someone in this sitting room during the night, she felt that everyone in the Police Judiciaire was laughing at her ... to the point where a succession of inspectors walked past the waiting room just to get a closer look at her.’

Maigret had lowered his head.

‘That’s when she ordered the spare key. She asked me ...’

‘Excuse me, wait a minute. Where were you in the habit of meeting your sister?’

‘In the street! When I needed to see her ...’

‘To ask her for money?’

‘Yes, exactly, to ask her for money! Anyone would think you were pleased to have worked that out! She really did manage to give me a few francs, never very much, that she’d scraped together out of the housekeeping money. I used to wait for her on the corner of the road at the time when she went shopping. Is that

what you wanted to know? There you are, then! It's about ten days ago that she gave me the key. She asked me to come to the apartment now and then by night and try to find out what was going on.'

'And did you?'

'I hadn't done it yet, because of my wife. The doctor is afraid the baby may be premature. I promised Cécile to come after ...'

'How would you have got through the front door of the building?'

'Cécile had thought of everything. The concierge comes upstairs with the post at seven every evening. She never fails to spend a few minutes with the Deséglise family – they rent the apartment on the second floor on the left. So I had only to come in at that moment.'

'And what about your aunt?'

'If she saw me, that would be just too bad! I know that whatever I say, you'll turn it against me! It's only too easy. Well, my aunt's legs gave her trouble, and at about that time every evening she got Cécile to give them a hot air massage, using the kind of electric dryer you find in hairdressers' salons. They make quite a lot of noise. All I'd have had to do was let myself into the apartment with my key and hide under Cécile's bed. Are you happy? Now I must admit that I'm quite hungry and my wife will be expecting me back. You frightened her with that visit of yours, and if I don't get back soon she'll be thinking ... So either you arrest me, or I'll ask for your permission to go home. As for the inheritance, which is ours by right, we'll see whether ...'

Here he turned his head aside, but not quickly enough to keep Maigret from seeing the tears of fury coming to his eyes.

'You can go,' said the inspector.

'Really?' inquired the young man sarcastically. 'You're not arresting me yet? That's too kind of you. I don't know how to thank you.'

Gérard wasn't sure he had heard correctly, but he thought that as he reached the door Maigret remarked, shrugging his shoulders, 'Little idiot!'

Did Nouchi still nourish hopes of seducing the inspector? She was certainly doing her best to give that impression, with a curious mixture of cunning and naivety. As she sat down in front of him, she even took care to raise her skirt above her angular knees.

‘Where were you?’ he asked, gruffly.

‘Out in the street.’

‘And what were you doing in the street?’

‘Talking to a friend.’

‘Are you sure this was the day before the crime was committed?’

‘It’s in my notebook. Every evening I write what I did in the day down in my notebook.’

Maigret reflected that he himself must feature in this deranged girl’s peculiar notebook. Nouchi was the kind of girl to fall in love with anyone, from the police officer on the corner, to a neighbour who comes by at the same time every day, to a film star whom she has seen only on the screen, or a famous murderer. At the moment Maigret topped the ratings!

‘I can’t tell you my friend’s name, because he’s married.’

Well, well, just like Berthe! Calm and composed Berthe with her cherry-red hat also had a lover who was a married man!

‘And you were in the street, near this building ... Weren’t you afraid of being seen by your parents?’

‘My parents take no notice of that ... They’re what you’d call *laid back*.’

‘And you say you saw Gérard Pardon entering the building.’

‘Yes, he was wearing the same clothes as today, that raincoat and his grey hat with the brim turned down. He looked round, and then he hurried into the corridor ...’

‘What time was it?’

‘Seven in the evening. I’m sure of that, because the postman had just gone by on the last of the day’s rounds.’

‘Thank you.’

‘It’s important, isn’t it?’

‘I can’t really tell.’

‘But if Cécile’s brother was in the house that evening ...’

‘Thank you, mademoiselle.’

‘Don’t you want to ask me anything else?’

‘No.’

She was obviously still hopeful and made no move to get to her feet. ‘You can count on me to help you. I know this building really well. I could tell you ...’

‘No, thank you.’

He was making for the door, and she brushed past him on her way. Her muscles were as taut as violin strings. ‘Shouldn’t I come to your office so that my statement can be put on record?’

‘Not until we ask you to do so.’

‘Goodbye then, inspector.’

‘Goodbye.’

And Maigret went downstairs, with the key safely put away in his pocket. Inspector Jourdan was still at his post on the pavement. Maigret signalled to him to stay where he was and looked for a taxi.

His wife couldn’t get a word out of him while he was having lunch at home in Boulevard Richard-Lenoir. He propped his elbows on the table, left breadcrumbs on the tablecloth and ate noisily – all of them bad signs.

Madame Maigret ventured to point out, ‘It’s not your fault about that girl Cécile.’ At such moments she addressed him formally. Indeed, she had even been known to speak of him to third parties as ‘the detective chief inspector’, or alternatively, but rarely, to say, ‘I’ll ask Monsieur Maigret’ about this or that.

Did he even notice that he was eating a delicious crème caramel? As soon as he had wiped his mouth on his napkin, he took his overcoat, which was as stiff as a military greatcoat, off its hook. She could tell just by looking at him that it was useless to ask what time he would be home in the evening.

‘Hôtel du Centre, Boulevard Montparnasse,’ he told the driver as he got into a taxi.

The hotel was a quiet one, catering for regular guests from the provinces, almost all of whom visited Paris on certain fixed days. There was a smell of veal casserole and biscuits in the air.

‘Monsieur Monfils, please,’ he asked.

‘He’s waiting for you in the conservatory, sir.’

For the hotel had a conservatory, or anyway a room with large windows, containing a rockery and indoor plants. Monsieur Monfils, still in his mourning garb, a handkerchief in his hand, his nostrils pink and moist, was seated in a rattan chair and smoking a cigar, in the company of a man whom Maigret had met before, or so he thought.

'Let me introduce my lawyer, Maître Leloup. He will be representing my interests in Paris from now on.'

The lawyer was as stout as Monfils was thin and had a glass of something that looked good on the table in front of him.

'Good day, inspector,' he said. 'Do sit down. My client ...'

'Excuse me,' Maigret interrupted, 'but I didn't know that Monsieur Monfils already needed a lawyer.'

'I'm a commercial lawyer, inspector. We find ourselves facing a situation that, to say the least of it, is unclear, and until the will comes to light ...'

'Who's to say that there *is* a will?'

'Why, obviously! A well-to-do woman, a woman with her head screwed on like Madame Boynet, née Cazenove, can't have failed to ...'

But at this moment Madame Monfils and the five Monfils sons made their way into the conservatory, the boys still in order of height.

'I'm sorry to interrupt,' said their mother, with a polite smile, 'but we're leaving, Henri. We've just got enough time to get to the station. Goodbye, inspector. Goodbye, Maître Leloup. You won't be staying in Paris too long, Henri, will you?'

The children said goodbye to their father in turn. The bellhop was waiting with their luggage. Finally, when his family had left, Henri Monfils poured himself a glass of brandy and, after pouring another for Maigret without asking him, he began, 'I thought it my duty, inspector, and in particular my duty to my family, to call on the services of a lawyer, who will be in touch with you henceforward, and who ...'

His nose was running. Monfils just had time to fish his handkerchief out of his pocket, wondering at the same time why the inspector was rising to his feet and picking up his bowler hat, which he had left on a chair.

'But I ... where are you going?'

'I'll be happy to see Maître Leloup at my office when he has a statement to make to me,' replied Maigret. 'Good day to you, gentlemen.'

Henri Monfils couldn't get over it. 'What was the matter with him? What on earth came over him?'

The lawyer, sitting back in his rattan chair and warming the brandy glass in his podgy hand, murmured optimistically, 'Take no notice, the police are like

that. They don't care for dealing with businessmen, you see, so it annoyed him to find me here. You can rely on me to ...'

He interrupted himself, putting his mind to biting off the end of the cigar that his client had offered him. 'Believe me, if you ...'

The first editions of the evening paper had just come out and they contained photographs of the funeral. One of them had a good view of Maigret beside Cécile's grave, next to the deacon with his aspergillum.

Jourdan, still kicking his heels outside the building in Bourg-la-Reine, where lights were beginning to come on in the windows; the head of the Sûreté Nationale, phoning from his office and not sure what to say to the public prosecutor; and Madame Maigret, busy scouring her pans, would all have been greatly surprised to see Maigret, his hands in his pockets, pipe between his teeth, walking down Boulevard Montparnasse with a grumpy expression on his face, stopping outside a cinema with its foyer plastered with brightly coloured posters, and then finally going up to the ticket office, and holding out some cash.

'A balcony seat, please,' he asked.

He then followed the young girl in a black silk dress with a Peter Pan collar who went ahead of him, shining the narrow beam of her electric torch on the steps.

'Excuse me ... excuse me ... excuse me.'

He made his way along a row of seats, aware that he was annoying everyone and treading on toes as he passed.

He had no idea what film was being shown. Loud voices apparently coming from nowhere filled the auditorium, while on screen a ship's captain was throwing a girl down on the bunk in his cabin.

'So you came here to spy on me!'

'Have mercy, Captain Brown! If not on me, then at least on ...'

'Excuse me,' said a timid little voice on the inspector's right, and his neighbour pulled away the skirt of her coat, on which Maigret was sitting.



7.

Maigret was warm. Nice and warm, as he used to say when he was a child, and if the lights in the auditorium had suddenly come on, revealing him wrapped up in his overcoat, hands in his pockets, his body leaning slightly backwards and his eyes half-closed, he would have looked the very essence of bliss.

In fact it was a little trick that he used on himself when he had been thinking of the same subject for too long and he felt his mind about to start running on empty. In summer he would have gone to sit on the terrace of a café in the sun, where he would have let himself muse quietly over a beer.

When they had put in central heating at Quai des Orfèvres, and the inspector had asked and been granted permission to keep his old coal-burning stove, the younger inspectors had shrugged their shoulders. In fact it was for the sake of the same trick. When he was stuck, when he had been poring over a problem for so long that it seemed to be empty of all substance, no more than an web of incoherent, cold thoughts, Maigret added more fuel to the stove, warmed himself up sometimes facing it, sometimes with his back to it, poked the burning coals, allowed it to draw, and little by little he relaxed with a sense of well-being. His eyelids tingled, and everything round him seemed blurred, an impression to which the smoke of his eternal pipe contributed.

In this state of physical lethargy, his mind seized upon connections that sometimes seemed absurd, following paths along which pure reason would not have led him.

Madame Maigret had never understood. When she touched his arm at the end of an evening spent like this in the cinema, she always sighed, ‘You’ve been

asleep again, Maigret ... I wonder why you pay twelve francs for a cinema seat when you have such a good bed at home.'

The auditorium was dark, full of the warmth of humanity, alive with the hundreds of people sitting there side by side, but all the same knowing nothing of each other. The long triangle of pale light from the projection room passed above their heads, attracting tobacco smoke.

If anyone had asked Maigret what the film was, he couldn't have said. It didn't matter. He watched the images without seeing any connection between them. Then his glance moved lower, having noticed a slight movement close to him.

Though he was a powerful man who for nearly thirty years had been dealing, so to speak, with passion taken to the utmost, in other words to crime, Maigret was personally chaste, and he coughed, shocked by the behaviour of the woman next to him and her companion, although all he could actually see of the latter was a white hand. Just now, however, when he inadvertently sat on his neighbour's coat he had thought she was young. She wasn't moving. Her face, pale like the man's hand and the part of her thigh that it was exposing, remained turned to the screen.

'Ahem!' the inspector coughed, feeling uneasy. 'Ahem!'

The lovers paid him no attention. She must be much the same age as Nouchi.

In fact, when Nouchi had seen Gérard entering the Bourg-la-Reine apartment building at seven in the evening – or had she really seen him? – she too had been with a lover, in the dark, no doubt up against a wall.

He heard the whisper of a kiss close to him. He had a taste like someone else's saliva in his mouth. He hunched even further down into his overcoat.

Nouchi had been enticing him in the most brazen way a little while ago. If he had wanted ... Were there many girls of that age who threw themselves at mature men who could lay claim to some kind of celebrity, or merely some social standing?

I wouldn't be surprised if her companion is a good deal older than her, he thought, meaning the lover of the girl in the seat beside him.

This was his way of thinking without really thinking, in snatches of ideas that he didn't try to connect with each other.

Had the Hungarian girl been lying about Monsieur Charles? Probably not. Dandurand was exactly the kind of man to leave his door ajar, watching out for a young girl and offering to show her pornographic photographs. Nouchi, for her part, was capable of doing everything in her power to keep him in suspense, ready to call for help when ...

What was disturbing was the fact that she claimed to have seen Gérard Pardon at seven in the evening, exactly the time when Madame With-All-Due-Respect, on her way up to the Deséglise apartment, was not keeping an eye on the stairs.

When her statement was official ...

Well, then a perverse girl's statement would be enough to send a man to prison, and who knew ...

He felt very ill at ease. It wasn't just the idea of Gérard coming out of the Boulevard Arago gate of La Santé prison first thing in the morning ... He was still looking at the screen, and he frowned. For a few moments he felt that something wasn't natural, and then he realized what it was; the lips of the characters in the film were moving, but not quite in time with their words. In fact the people on screen were speaking English, but you heard French; it was a dubbed soundtrack, and wasn't perfectly synchronized.

The behaviour of the couple beside him was getting worse and worse, but the inspector's mind was elsewhere. What exactly was it that had been throwing him off the track for the last three days? He hadn't worked it out, but now he understood. Something basic was wrong. What was it? He didn't know yet.

With his eyes half-closed he saw, more clearly than if he had been there in front of it, the building like a slice of Neapolitan ice cream on Route d'Orléans, the bicycle shop, the widow Piéchaud's grocery store. As he had known since the day before, she was not really a widow; her husband had run off with a woman of ill repute, as she put it, and she was so ashamed of it that she claimed to have been widowed.

But then there was Madame With-All-Due-Respect, in her stuffy lodge, her head askew, her neck wrapped in thermal wadding to keep it warm ...

Because she hadn't pulled the cord to let any stranger into the building, he had concluded over-hastily that no such person had come in or gone out of it on the night in question.

However, he now knew that it was possible to get in at seven in the evening without being seen by the concierge. What proof was there that there weren't other such fixed moments during the day?

Up at the top of the building, that old obsessive Juliette Boynet surrounded herself with mystery to receive Charles Dandurand and discuss her investments in institutions that were, to say the least, unedifying. It was improper, but it was human. In the course of his career, Maigret had encountered other phenomena of that sort.

And other men like Dandurand.

So what was it that jarred? What was not quite natural about the set-up?

The old woman had been strangled, no doubt when, after Dandurand had left, she was about to go to bed. She was still wearing one stocking.

Must he assume that there was a third key, and it was in the hands of Monsieur Charles? Should he think that Monsieur Charles had gone back up to the apartment to kill the old lady?

He had done well out of the association. Juliette was worth more to him alive than dead.

What about his underworld friends? They weren't beginners, cowardly thugs ready to try anything, but men who had made it, who were well established in life and were not at all anxious to take risks. They were sincere when they said they were upset by the murder and it did them harm.

Gérard Pardon?

Maigret almost exploded. 'For heaven's sake keep quiet!' His neighbours in the seats next to him were really going too far; they were acting as if they were alone in the huge, dark auditorium.

... Gérard, hidden in his sister's room since seven in the evening ... Gérard listening in, without revealing himself, on the conversation between Juliette Boynet and Monsieur Charles, perhaps seeing the wads of banknotes and deciding to grab them once his aunt was on her own.

If so, then he must assume that, having committed the crime, Gérard had stayed in the apartment until morning, since the concierge had not opened the front door of the building to anyone.

He must also assume that it was Gérard whom Cécile had come to denounce, when she was waiting for Maigret in the Aquarium at Quai des Orfèvres.

Finally, he must then suppose that it was Gérard who had followed her to the broom cupboard.

How could Gérard Pardon, who had never had anything to do with the police, have known not only about that cupboard, but about the door giving access to the Palais de Justice from the Police Judiciaire?

A sudden movement beside him, a skirt being pulled down, the words ‘The End’ on the screen, and at the same time all the lights coming on, and there was much stamping of feet.

Standing up like everyone else, Maigret followed the rest of the audience out and looked curiously at his neighbour. He saw a calm little face, a fresh complexion, round cheeks and innocently smiling eyes. He had been right about the man with her: he was about forty and wore a wedding ring.

Still dazed, the inspector found himself in noisy, teeming Boulevard Montparnasse. It must be six o’clock. Night had fallen. Dark shapes walked swiftly past brightly lit shop-window displays. He felt thirsty, went into La Coupole, sat down by a window and ordered a beer.

A kind of weariness had come over him. He delayed the moment of returning to the harsh light of reality. The right thing to do would have been to make haste to Quai des Orfèvres, where Lucas was grappling with his Poles.

Instead, he ordered a ham sandwich, and his eyes went on wandering aimlessly over the busy crowd passing by. It had taken him a few minutes just now – perhaps quarter of an hour – to work out what had shaken him in the cinema: the lack of synchronization between the movements of the actors’ lips and the words on the soundtrack.

How much time would it take him to find out what was wrong in the Bourg-la-Reine case? The sandwich was a good one. The beer was good as well, and he ordered another.

In the course of every notably successful investigation, or almost every one of them, there was at least one journalist who published a column on what had now to some extent become a traditional subject: The Methods of Detective Chief Inspector Maigret.

Let the journalist try to solve it then, Maigret thought, leaving the cinema ... having a bite to eat, drinking beer. Sitting at the steamed-up window of La

Coupole, he looked like some stout provincial astonished by all the hurry and bustle of Paris.

To be honest, he wasn't thinking of anything. He both was and was not in Boulevard Montparnasse, for wherever he went he took the building like a slab of Neapolitan ice cream with him. He went into it. He came out again. He watched Madame With-All-Due-Respect in her lair ... he went up the stairs, he came down them again.

The pensioner with the tinted hair had been strangled: fact one. Her money and the paperwork relating to it had disappeared: fact two.

Eight hundred thousand francs in thousand-franc notes. He tried to imagine what such a pile of banknotes looked like.

Cécile in the Aquarium, the waiting room at Quai des Orfèvres; she had been there since eight in the morning.

It was strange, but he was already having difficulty in conjuring up her face, familiar to him as its features had been. He saw in his mind's eye the black coat, the green hat, and on her knees that enormous, ridiculous handbag. It looked like an attaché case, and she took it everywhere with her.

Cécile herself had been murdered, and the bag had disappeared ...

Maigret stayed where he was, his glass of beer on hold, hardly aware of what he was looking at. Anyone who spoke to him at that moment would have had to bring him back from very far away.

The jarring aspect of the case ...

He mustn't go too fast. He mustn't scare the truth away, for fear of losing sight of it again.

Cécile. The handbag. The broom cupboard ...

Her aunt who had been strangled ...

Because Cécile with her squint had been strangled too, it had been assumed – Maigret himself had assumed – that the two crimes ...

He heaved a sigh of relief and took a large, frothy mouthful of beer.

His mistake, the mistake that had left him going round in circles like a blind carousel horse, was to have looked for a single murderer.

Why not two? Why suppose from the first that the same person had committed both crimes?

L’Intransigeant from the sixth ... ask to see *L’Intran* for the sixth of the month, he told himself.

A waiter brought him the newspaper, and he looked at it. The photograph splashed all over the front page made him frown. It showed him larger than he imagined himself, larger than he thought he really was, his pipe fiercely clamped in his jaws, one hand on the shoulder of a young man in a trenchcoat, none other than Gérard. He didn’t remember placing his hand on Cécile’s brother’s shoulder. He must have done it without thinking.

The reporter had drawn his own conclusions, for the wording under the picture ran:

Pure chance? It rather looks as if the heavy hand of the law, in the person of Detective Chief Inspector Maigret, is coming down on the trembling shoulder of a guilty man.

‘Idiot!’ exclaimed Maigret. ‘Waiter ... what do I owe you?’

He was both furious and satisfied. He left La Coupole with a firm tread very different from his gait when he had left the cinema and entered the café. He would take a taxi – never mind the cashier’s insistence that the Métro was the quickest way to get from A to B.

Ten minutes later, he was making his way into the Police Judiciaire and opening the door of his office. The Pole was there, perched on the front of a chair, while Lucas was ensconced in the inspector’s own armchair. A gesture from Maigret, and Lucas followed his boss into the inspectors’ office.

‘Janvier and I have been questioning him for ten hours. He hasn’t cracked yet, but I get the impression he’s beginning to waver. If I’m not much mistaken, he’ll be ready to talk some time in the small hours.’ He wouldn’t be the first whose endurance had to be pushed to its limits. ‘Maybe if you could come back at about two or three in the morning and deliver the final blow ...’

‘I just don’t have time,’ Maigret growled.

The offices were beginning to empty; there would be only one light left on in the huge, dusty corridor, and a single man on watch at the switchboard. So the Pole would be left facing the persistent Lucas in Maigret’s office, with Janvier taking over from Lucas now and then, giving both officers time for a beer and a bite to eat in the Brasserie Dauphine.

‘Did anyone phone for me?’

‘A man called Dandurand.’

‘Any message from him?’

‘Yes, he said he wouldn’t be leaving his apartment, but he has some interesting news for you.’

‘And no one called in person?’

‘I don’t know … you’d have to ask the clerk.’

The clerk said yes, there had been someone to see Maigret. ‘A young fellow in a raincoat with a mourning band on one sleeve. He was in a bad way, very upset, wanted to know when you’d be back. I said I didn’t know. Then he wanted your home address, but I wasn’t giving him that.’

‘Gérard Pardon?’

‘A name like that, yes. Didn’t want to fill in a form.’

‘When was this?’

‘About half an hour ago.’

‘And he’ll have had a newspaper in his hand, or in his pocket,’ said the inspector, to the clerk’s surprise.

‘Yes, you’re right, sir. It was *L’Intran*. He was holding it all crumpled up.’

Maigret went back into the inspectors’ office. ‘Who’s free at the moment? Torrence?’

‘I’m supposed to be going to Bourg-la-Reine, sir.’

‘Never mind that. Go to Rue du Pas-de-la-Mule instead. Number 22. Would you recognize the lad?’

‘Cécile’s brother, yes. I saw him in Bourg-la-Reine.’

‘Right. Ring his doorbell, and I hope he’ll be back there. If he is, find a reason to stick close to him. We don’t want him doing anything stupid, understand? Go gently with him, don’t scare him – the opposite, in fact.’

‘What if he isn’t home?’

Maigret’s face darkened and he made a helpless gesture. ‘If he’s not home … well, I suppose we can only wait for a phone call from the river patrol, unless he’s managed to get hold of a revolver … Just a minute … Anyway, telephone me at – wait a moment, who’s likely to have a telephone at home? Dandurand, for sure! Telephone me at Charles Dandurand’s address. You’ll find the number in the phone book. Goodnight, then.’

He went back into his own office for a moment, just long enough to scrutinize the Pole slowly from head to foot, as if taking the man’s moral temperature. As

he left he winked at Lucas, who went back to interrogating the Pole. The wink meant that they'd soon have him where they wanted him.

A taxi took Maigret to Route d'Orléans, and he got out opposite the apartment building, which was beginning to be a familiar sight. Who was on watch? He glanced around, and a figure moved out of the shadows.

'I'm here, sir.'

Verduret was a recent recruit, a nice boy, in awe of his boss, so much so that he was inclined to stutter when he talked to him.

'Any news?'

'The fourth-floor tenant, Monsieur Charles, came home by tram at six. Someone was waiting for him in the corridor. A fat little man, sir, in a grey overcoat with a half-belt at the back and a briefcase under his arm.'

A moment's thought enabled Maigret to place the visitor. He must be the lawyer representing Monfils, Maître Leloup.

'Did he stay long?'

'Half an hour. Monsieur Siveschi, the Hungarian gentleman, went out about five, and I haven't seen him come back yet. And then there's his daughter ...'

The young officer pointed to two figures merging with the shadows, standing by the fence round some waste ground.

'It's been going on for three-quarters of an hour,' he sighed, 'and they don't so much as move.'

Imperceptibly Maigret blushed and went into the building. In passing, he greeted Madame Benoit, who was sitting over a plate of soup, and weightily climbed the four floors up. Monsieur Charles must have recognized his step, because he opened the door before the inspector rang the bell.

'I was expecting you. Please come in. After your conversation with my friends this morning ...'

There were no two ways about it, Maigret couldn't get used to the rancid odour of the old bachelor's apartment. He felt a revulsion for it that was both physical and moral and was puffing out dense clouds of smoke.

'What did Maître Leloup come for?'

'You already know he's been here? He's threatening me with proceedings for misappropriation of the inheritance. He feels sure that Juliette made a will, basing his evidence on the letters that she wrote her cousin Monfils every New

Year. You'd better ask him to let you see them. She describes her nephew and nieces as degenerate parasites, tells him how ungrateful they've been to her and says that after all she's done for them in memory of her sister they're only after her money. "It will serve them right," she ended one letter, "and the Boynets and Machepieds too, when they discover that I've left everything to you."

'Did Maître Leloup confine himself to threats?'

The grey-faced Monsieur Charles stretched his lips in an icy smile. 'He made me what he calls generous and honest propositions.'

'Share and share alike?'

'Something of that nature. Which would be an appreciable sum if there was a will.' Monsieur Dandurand cracked his finger joints. 'But those people didn't know Juliette. To tell you the truth, I was the only one to see her as she really was. She was so terrified of death, and having to leave her money behind some day, that she was close to believing she'd never die. Or at least not for a very long time. "When I'm an old woman," she was always saying to me ...'

Obnoxious as the man was, Maigret sensed that he was not lying. All he himself had seen of Juliette was a corpse with badly tinted hair, but his impression corresponded exactly with what Monsieur Charles said.

'So the outcome was ...'

'I showed Maître Leloup the door. But that's not why I phoned you. I realize that my situation is a delicate one, and I can see that my best chance is for you to find the murderer ...'

'Or murderers,' growled Maigret, scrutinizing a watercolour hanging on the wall.

'Or murderers, if you like. Indeed, there's nothing to prove that there weren't several of them involved.'

'In any case, there are two bodies, so that means there were two crimes.'

And Maigret placidly refilled and lit his pipe.

'That's certainly one theory ... I was telling you that after you left, I remembered something,' said Monsieur Charles. He took a notebook covered in waxcloth off the corner of his desk. 'I wasn't a practising lawyer for so many years without acquiring some of the habits of the profession. Every time I took Juliette the interest on her investments, I made sure to write down the numbers

of the banknotes ... it may be ridiculous, but as it happens that might come in useful for you.'

The notebook was full of figures.

'Don't forget, I had nothing else to fill my days.'

Indeed, Maigret could well imagine him sitting in this study, with its smell of crushed bugs, copying down column after column of figures with chilly satisfaction. Never mind the fact that the banknotes were not his! He still enjoyed the sensual pleasure of fingering them, recording their numbers, sorting them into bundles, grouping the bundles together and putting elastic bands round them.

'So you see,' he concluded, holding the notebook out to Maigret, 'that if you earn the reward offered by my friends, I shall have assisted you to the best of my ability.'

Nouchi could be heard on her way home, going up the stairs three at a time. She stopped for a moment outside Monsieur Charles' door. Had she been behaving as badly as the plump girl in the cinema?

What business of his was that? In what way did the girl's words and actions

...

'As it happens, I didn't dine at my usual restaurant because I was waiting for you, so I made do with a cold cutlet. Have you dined yourself? Will you take a little glass of something?'

'No, thank you.'

'One day you'll realize that I've done all I could, and – well, just as you like.'

As Maigret opened the door, without even saying that he was leaving, he let in blasts of piano music. No doubt Mademoiselle Paucot, the piano teacher, was getting her revenge on the scales through which her pupils stumbled.



8.

One day, when Madame Maigret was looking pensively at her husband, she had suddenly sighed, with almost comical candour, ‘I do wonder why you haven’t been slapped in the face more often in your life.’

It was deeply heartfelt. In fact there were moments when, even with her, Maigret could be extraordinarily overbearing, and his wife was probably the only one who knew that he was entirely unaware of it. It wasn’t that you saw an ironic smile or a glint of mockery in his eyes, nothing like that. You found yourself facing a solid block offering nothing you could get a grip on, a man who continued to be absorbed in his internal monologue while you were talking and getting worked up. Was the inspector listening to you? Did he see you, or only the wall above your head? He would suddenly interrupt you in the middle of a sentence or a word, and what he said bore no relation to your preceding remarks.

So while Charles Dandurand was still talking, while the door, standing ajar, was letting in piano chords, Maigret froze as if intent on the music. How long since he had stopped taking part in the conversation? Where had his mind been straying?

‘You have a telephone, I suppose?’ he asked.

‘Why, yes. I do.’

Did he even know that Dandurand was in front of him, waiting to be able to close his door? He hesitated, in mid-soliloquy.

‘I wonder ...’

He didn't do it on purpose, and yet the former lawyer was not the only one to have been taken aback by his manner. What did he want? What had he thought up now? Was it important or immaterial? You couldn't guess from seeing him draw his thick eyebrows together in a frown, nod his head and finally murmur, 'Oh yes, I forgot to tell you – I gave a colleague your address, in case he needed to telephone me. While I wait to hear from him, I'll ask you to go upstairs with me. We'll be sure to hear if the phone rings from up there.'

'Is it all right if I take my key?'

On the fifth-floor landing, the inspector paused.

'You said it was a little after midnight when you visited Madame Boynet. You had your slippers on?'

He looked at Monsieur Charles's feet, encased in brown kid slippers.

'I don't suppose you used to ring her bell?'

'Juliette would wait on the other side of the door. I didn't even have to knock.'

'Right. Let's go in. Was there a light on in the front hall?'

'No, the only light came from the sitting room. She left the door ajar.'

'Just a moment. I'll put the sitting-room light on.'

'Not that one, inspector. Only the fake alabaster night-light on the pedestal table.'

Monsieur Charles was annoyed, but he seemed to be entering into the spirit of Maigret's game without any sign of anxiety. He seemed to be saying: see, this trick of yours doesn't impress me. I have nothing to fear and nothing to hide. On the contrary! Like you, I'm looking only for the truth. So if you're after a meticulous reconstruction, that's what you'll get.

Out loud, he said, 'I can tell you that I was wearing the same suit as today, but with a white muffler. And I was holding – no, in the right-hand inside pocket of my jacket I had an envelope containing ...'

'In a minute. If you don't mind, first we'll put this room back in order. You must know where every piece of furniture and every ornament should go.'

They were equally grave-faced, and Monsieur Charles, as if ironically, took the greatest care to find the precise place where every chair had stood, then standing back to consider the effect of his labours.

'There! I think that was it.'

‘One question, please. I suppose that Madame Boynet had her stick in one hand when she went to open the door to you?’

‘She’d have had difficulty in walking without it.’

‘Can you tell me what she was wearing?’

‘That’s easy enough. She had a greenish dressing gown on over her night-clothes. I remember noticing that her stockings were drooping in wrinkles round her ankles.’

‘Both her stockings?’

‘Both of them, yes. She was in the habit of wearing two stockings, if that’s what you want to know. And old slip-on shoes with felt soles. Juliette wasn’t vain. In fact I think she felt some satisfaction in appearing at her least attractive – that evening her hair was down, her face shiny with night cream and her eyes puffy.’

‘You didn’t notice any other light in the apartment and you confirm that you didn’t leave this room?’

‘That’s right.’

‘Where was Madame Boynet sitting?’

‘Facing her desk, which she had opened. She knew that I was coming to settle the accounts for her.’

‘One moment ... where did she get the key to open the desk?’

This time the lawyer hesitated slightly.

‘I ... no, as a matter of fact I don’t remember. I suppose she had the key in her dressing-gown pocket.’

‘Tell me, Monsieur Dandurand ... if she opened the desk when you were coming to give her a statement of accounts, then she must have kept her business papers in it.’

‘Well, yes.’ Monsieur Charles, looking more serious, thought about it. ‘You’re right. I confess that I hadn’t thought of that.’

‘What did you talk about all that time?’

‘We never talked much. I must have told her that I thought I’d caught a cold in town, which explained my muffler. And I told her that I would probably have to go to Béziers.’

After looking round the room, Maigret asked an even more unexpected question. ‘Were all these clocks working?’

Some of them had stopped now, and the inspector automatically went to wind them up. They showed different times.

‘I didn’t notice.’

What possible importance could that have?

‘You’ll notice, Monsieur Dandurand, that although three floors separate us from Mademoiselle Paucot’s apartment we can hear her piano here almost as clearly as in yours. Sound carries well in this building. That’s reassuring, because if my colleagues telephone me then we’ll be sure to hear them. Let’s go on. You were sitting where you are now? At this point we come to the envelope, which contained ...’

‘Fifty-two thousand francs. The quarterly profits of the house in Rue d’Antin.’

‘Did she count the notes?’

‘She always counted them.’

‘And was she aware that you were keeping a record of the numbers?’

‘I never told her that. While she was sorting the thousand-franc notes ten by ten, I mentioned to her that Béziers has avoided replying to our letters for the last few weeks. The manager we installed there, who ...’

Looking at Maigret, he felt sure that the inspector wasn’t really listening. Indeed, he got the impression that Maigret thought what he was saying was of no importance. He was smoking his pipe and looking at the pictures of the family, particularly those of the three children, and another photograph, the only one of its kind in the apartment, showing a shapely young woman of thirty with provocation in her eyes and in the curve of her throat: in fact a beautiful woman who must be Juliette.

‘Carry on, Monsieur Dandurand.’

‘It’s difficult, if not impossible, to supervise business of this kind. As you have already been told, in the case of any irregularities we can’t turn to the law. That explains why ...’

Maigret had opened the dining-room door and then shut it again.

‘Go on, go on. Take no notice of me.’

This time he went right out of the sitting room, while Dandurand was talking in a voice that carried no conviction.

‘I offered to go to Béziers myself to question the residents in person, as the only way to establish the average of the receipts coming in, which ...’

‘Yes, go on,’ the inspector’s distant voice insisted.

‘If you say so ... I do remember pointing out to Madame Boynet that the winter season was not enough to explain such a drop in those receipts; they went down by a third last month ...’

At last the inspector reappeared in the doorway, giving Monsieur Charles a curious look, as if wondering: what’s this man doing here, and why is he talking to himself?

‘Tell me, while you were discussing these matters with her, did you hear any noise in the apartment? And were you speaking at the same volume as now?’

‘No, I kept my voice very low, because Juliette was always afraid her niece might wake up in spite of the bromide. She didn’t trust the Hungarians next door either; she could hear their strident voices and their arguments all day. She had been trying to give them notice for several months, but they clung on for all they were worth.’

‘What did she do with the fifty-two thousand francs?’

‘She had them in her hand when she escorted me back to the door.’

‘In the envelope?’

‘I think she’d put them back in the envelope, yes.’

‘An ordinary envelope?’

‘A used envelope that I picked up from my desk. Wait a moment ... it was yellow. Now what post did I receive that day? Yes ... I’m almost sure it was a Crédit Lyonnais envelope, with my address typed on it.’

‘Did you ever see that envelope again?’

‘No, I didn’t.’

He couldn’t keep a touch of sarcasm out of his voice. Did Maigret think he was throwing him off balance by suddenly changing the subject like this?

‘Do you mind if I smoke, inspector?’

‘Come to think of it, when you visited your friend Juliette, did you happen to smoke here?’

‘Yes, often.’

‘What did you smoke?’

‘I see that you are better informed than I was aware, and if I didn’t have a clear conscience ... But how can you know? You never met Juliette Boynet when she was alive, did you?’

This time, if he was not actually uneasy he would have admitted to being intrigued.

'I mean, there isn't an ashtray in this room. I'm sure I never left cigarette ends lying about, and as for the ashes from my pipe ...' He laughed nervously. 'I confess that I don't understand, inspector. I'll tell you what the situation was, and then you will see why I'm surprised. Long ago, I came here with my pipe one day, and Juliette, who had her own ideas on such subjects, told me that she didn't like to see a man smoking a pipe in front of a woman. Some nights we worked for several hours, so I brought cigarettes with me. To avoid leaving ash around, I put a piece of paper on this corner of the desk to act as an ashtray, and took it away with me when I left.'

Maigret was still looking at him with the same impersonal expression.

'But how you know that is more than I can ... Unless ...'

'Unless?' repeated the inspector.

'Unless there was someone hidden in the apartment, following everything we said and did. But that someone would still have had to be able to get in touch with you and tell you ...'

'Well, it hardly matters, does it? When Juliette Boynet went back to the door with you, she was holding the fifty-two banknotes ... and you were using the envelope to take your cigarette ash away. I suppose Juliette locked the door after you?'

'Yes, and she bolted it too.'

'Did you go straight back to your own apartment? Did you meet anyone on the way? Or hear anything? I don't suppose you know whether your old friend went to bed at once?'

'I've no idea.'

They both pricked up their ears. The sound of a telephone ringing could be clearly heard, and Maigret hurried to the door, asking, 'May I? I think that must be the phone call I'm expecting.'

The door of the fourth-floor apartment was still closed, and the lights inside were on. The telephone was on Dandurand's desk.

'Hello? Torrence?'

'Is that you, sir? I'm still in Rue du Pas-de-la-Mule.'

'Gérard?'

'I haven't seen him. Listen ... it's rather complicated. I'm not sure about telling you all this over the phone ...'

'Quiet ... Wait a minute.'

Inspector Torrence must be wondering why he was asked to keep quiet. The fact was that Maigret had just heard footsteps overhead. He worked out that they must be in Juliette Boynet's bedroom. The sound was perfectly distinct. It was all very well for Monsieur Charles to wear slippers and take precautions; his movements were audible all the same.

'Hello ... are you still there, sir?'

'Quiet, I said.'

'Shall I stay on the line?'

'Keep quiet, I tell you.'

Suddenly he ran for the door, leaving the telephone receiver lying on the desk. When he reached Madame Boynet's apartment, Monsieur Charles was already at the front door, his expression impassive but sombre.

'Was that your telephone call?' he asked.

'I haven't finished it yet. Will you come downstairs, please ...'

'I'm sorry, I was afraid of being indiscreet.'

This time Maigret had the impression that there was annoyance or perhaps anxiety in the eyes of that cold fish Monsieur Charles.

'I'll follow you down, inspector. If I'd known that ...'

'You first, please.'

'Where are we going?'

'Back to your study. Right ... close the door and stay where you are. Would you be good enough to put your hands on the table?' He had picked up the receiver again.

'All right, Torrence, I'm listening.'

'Oh, I thought we'd been cut off. Well, it's like this, sir. When I got here I questioned the concierge, and she told me that Gérard Pardon hadn't come home, but his wife was in. So I positioned myself less than three metres from the entrance, and it began to rain ...'

'Never mind that.'

'Well, I'm soaked ... I didn't dare go to the corner café to get a drink. I was there for hours. A few minutes ago, quarter of an hour at the most, a young

woman arrived in a taxi. I recognized her by her red hat – Gérard Pardon's sister Berthe – you pointed her out to me ...'

'And then?'

Little did Torrence know that, as he made his report, the inspector was listening with only one ear, while he looked Monsieur Charles up and down. As for the former lawyer himself, he kept both his hands flat on the desk, maintaining a deliberately awkward position.

What had the man been doing upstairs? It was the first time since Juliette's death that he had been in her apartment on his own.

'Carry on, I'm listening.'

'I didn't have any instructions ... well, the girl went upstairs. After a few minutes, I thought she might have been bringing bad news, so I went up myself. I knocked on the door, and the girl opened it. There isn't a front hall, and Madame Pardon was in the kitchen, sobbing. She looked at me, wild-eyed, asking, "Is he dead?"'

There must have been an expression of great surprise on Maigret's face, because Monsieur Charles frowned.

'Then what?'

'I was terribly embarrassed, I can tell you, sir. I asked the girl what she'd been doing, and she told me we were brutes, and if anything bad happened to her brother it would be our responsibility ... One of them in floods of tears, the other calling me names, and I couldn't get any sense out of them! Well, I waited patiently, and finally I found out that Gérard had been to see his sister. He'd been carrying on like a madman, telling her he wanted money at once. She tried to calm him down and find out what he wanted the money for. He said, with a sarcastic laugh, that she'd find out from the newspapers tomorrow, and for heaven's sake she must give him everything she had. So she gave him a hundred and thirty francs exactly, keeping only ten francs for herself, and he rushed out. She tried to follow him, but he jumped on a bus that was just moving away.'

'So I don't know what to do, sir. I left the two girls to come and phone you. Should I go back to them? Gérard Pardon's wife says he'll kill himself. If you ask me, I ...'

'That will do,' Maigret interrupted him.

'But ... but what should I do?'

However, the inspector had already hung up and without any further remark he told Monsieur Charles, ‘Empty your pockets!’

‘You want me to ...?’

‘Empty your pockets!’

‘If you say so.’

He complied slowly, taking the items out one by one and placing them on his desk: a well-worn wallet, a key, a penknife, a handkerchief that was far from clean, papers, a small box containing cough sweets, a tobacco pouch, a pipe and a box of matches.

‘Turn your pockets inside out ... turn your jacket inside out ...’

‘Would you like me to take all my clothes off?’

With some minor changes of wording, Madame Maigret might have made the same remark that she had addressed to her husband: ‘I do wonder why you haven’t been slapped in the face.’

In fact, of the two of them Monsieur Charles was more composed, colder, and his chilly manner was not without a touch of insolence. Taking off his jacket, he revealed shirt-sleeves with worn and grubby cuffs. His waistcoat matched them. His braces were in no better state than his shirt, and his underpants showed above his trousers.

‘Shall I go on?’

If the inspector had not restrained himself, it wasn’t a slap in the face that he would have given him, but a punch on the nose.

‘Do you want me to take my slippers off?’

‘Yes.’

Although one of his socks had a hole in it, his slippers did not contain so much as the smallest scrap of paper.

‘Let me point out, inspector, that it is eleven o’clock at night, and at this hour even if you had a search warrant in due form I would be within my rights to show you the door. I’m not doing that, I say so only to point out that ...’

‘Sit down.’

And he dialled a telephone number.

‘Be my guest,’ said the former lawyer sarcastically.

‘Hello ... Put Lucas on the line, will you? ... Is that you? ... Not yet? You’ll have to carry on, old fellow ... No, I don’t have the time. ... Who else is there?’

Berger? ... That's his bad luck! Tell him to get into a taxi and come to Bourg-la-Reine ... Yes, the fourth floor. Thanks, and good luck!'

He hung up and stood motionless, staring at the desk in front of him.

'If you're thinking of staying much longer, perhaps we could have that little drink.'

A single glance from Maigret silenced the other man. Ten minutes passed, a quarter of an hour. Cars drove by on the main road. The piano had fallen silent. The building was asleep.

At last the front door was heard closing down below, and soon footsteps came up the stairs.

'Come in, Berger.'

It must be raining harder than ever, for Inspector Berger's hat and his shoulders were wet, even though he had come by taxi.

'This is Monsieur Charles. He's rather upset this evening, and I'm afraid he might do something stupid. I have pointed out to him that it is not entirely within the letter of the law for us to occupy his apartment tonight, but he doesn't mind that. I'll leave him in your care. He can go to bed if he wants, and in that case I'd like you to watch over him as if he were a sick member of your family. I shall certainly be back here tomorrow morning. If I'm late, don't worry and don't let him go out, because he might catch cold ...'

He buttoned up his overcoat, filled his pipe and tamped the tobacco down with his thumb.

'And I wouldn't touch his cognac if I were you ... I don't think it's top quality.'

He took Dandurand's wallet off the table, along with the papers that the lawyer had taken out of his pocket.

'Did you tell the taxi to wait?'

'No, sir.'

'Too bad. Well, good night.'

And he left the two men together. For a moment he almost went up to the fifth floor, but what use would that be? Dandurand wasn't someone to leave traces behind him.

In the ground-floor corridor, he found Madame With-All-Due-Respect in her night-clothes, with her head tilted even further towards her shoulder than ever.

‘What’s going on, inspector? Has another crime been committed in this building?’

He wasn’t listening and hardly heard the indistinct words. Automatically, he replied, ‘Possibly. Let me have the cord, please.’



9.

It was still raining in the morning, a soft, dismal rain with the resignation of widowhood. You didn't see it falling; you didn't feel it, yet it covered everything with a cold film, and the surface of the Seine was pitted with thousands of lively little circles. At nine, you still felt as if you were off to catch an early train, for day was reluctant to dawn, and the gas lamps were still lit.

As Maigret climbed the stairs in the Police Judiciaire building, he couldn't help casting a glance at the Aquarium, and he still felt as if he would see Cécile sitting where he had last seen her, a humble figure patiently waiting. Why did such a distressing thought cross his mind this morning? On his way, not fully roused from sleep yet, brushing past dripping wet buildings, no doubt he had vaguely thought of the girl beside him in the cinema, and then of Nouchi, Monsieur Charles ... And now, as he reached the corridor of the Police Judiciaire building, he was wondering whether there had been anything between Cécile and Monsieur Dandurand.

There was nothing to give rise to that hypothesis. It bothered him. It sullied a memory, and yet from then on the inspector often thought about it.

'Don't go in ... there's someone here. The commissioner wants you to go and see him first.'

It was the clerk, preventing Maigret from going into his office.
'Someone here?' he repeated.

The next moment he was knocking at the commissioner's door.

'Come in, Maigret ... feeling better? Look, I let a visitor wait in your office. I didn't know where else to put him, and it's you he wants to see anyway. Read

this.'

Maigret, as if baffled, read the card, which informed him:

Jean Tinchant

Principal private secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would like you to facilitate the work of Mr Spencer Oats of the Institute of Criminology of Philadelphia, who has been warmly recommended to us by his embassy.

'What does he want?'

'He wants to study your methods.'

And the commissioner could not suppress a smile as Maigret left, his shoulders hunched, his fists clenched, as if he were about to crush the American criminologist.

'Pleased to meet you, inspector.'

'Just a minute, Monsieur Spencer. Hello? Get me the duty office. Maigret here. Hasn't he been found? Get Number 19 at Bourg-la-Reine on the line, please.'

The American looked all right. A tall young man of the university lecturer type, red hair, thin face, correct and well-cut suit, a slight and quite attractive accent.

'Is that you, Berger? Well?'

'No news, sir. He slept on the sofa fully clothed. Guess what? I was beginning to get hungry, and there isn't anything to eat in the apartment. I don't like to go downstairs to buy croissants ... Will you be here soon? ... No, he's behaved perfectly well ... He even said he didn't bear you a grudge, he'd have done the same in your place, and you'd soon realize you had made a mistake.'

Maigret hung up and went to sit in front of his stove. The sight of it had surprised the American.

'And how can I help you, Monsieur Spencer?' he asked.

He called the man by his first name because he hadn't the faintest idea how to pronounce Oats.

'First of all, detective chief inspector, I'd like to hear your ideas on the psychology of criminals.'

Meanwhile Maigret was opening his post, which he had found on his desk.

'What criminals?' he asked as he read.

‘Well ... criminals in general.’

‘*Before or after?*’

‘What do you mean?’

Maigret was smoking his pipe, reading his letters, warming his back and did not seem to think much of this desultory conversation.

‘I was asking whether you’re talking about criminals *before* they commit a crime or *after* they’ve committed it ... because before, obviously, they aren’t yet criminals. For thirty, forty, fifty years, sometimes more, they’ve been people like everyone else, don’t you agree?’

‘Yes, of course ...’

Maigret finally looked up and said, with a tiny spark of malice in his eyes, ‘Then why, Monsieur Spencer, do you expect their mentality to change all of a sudden because they’ve just killed one of their fellow men?’

He went over to the window to look at the circular patterns made by rain falling on the river.

‘That would lead us to think,’ the American concluded, ‘that criminals are people just like everyone else?’

There was a knock on the door. Lucas came in with a file and, on seeing the visitor, looked as if he were about to leave again.

‘What is it, old fellow? Ah, yes ... take this file to the public prosecutor’s office ... I assume the Hôtel des Arcades is still under surveillance?’

They exchanged a few remarks about the Poles, but Maigret did not lose track of his train of thought.

‘Why does a man commit a crime, Monsieur Spencer? Out of jealousy, greed, hatred, envy, more rarely out of necessity ... in short, when he is impelled by one of the human passions. We all have those passions in us to a greater or lesser degree. Suppose I hate my neighbour, who always opens his window on summer evenings to play the horn ... It’s not very likely that I’ll kill him. However, only about a month ago, a former colonial who had suffered from fever, so he wasn’t as patient as I am, fired a revolver at his neighbour upstairs because the neighbour had a wooden leg, and walked up and down in his apartment all night, with that leg pounding away on the floor ...’

‘Yes, I see what you’re getting at. But what about the mentality of a criminal *after* he has committed a crime?’

‘That’s nothing to do with me. That’s up to the jurors and the governors of prisons and penal colonies ... my role is to find out who committed crimes. For that, all I have to think about is their mentality before they did it. To know whether such and such a man was capable of committing such and such a crime, and when and how he committed it.’

‘The commissioner of the Police Judiciaire suggested that you might perhaps let me sit in on ...’

And not for the first time! Too bad for the American!

‘I know that you’re investigating the case at Bourg-la-Reine, and I’ve read everything the newspapers have to say about it ... Do you know who’s guilty of the murder yet?’

‘At least I know someone who isn’t guilty of it but all the same ... Let me ask you a question in my own turn, Monsieur Spencer. A man believes that he is a suspect, thinking whether rightly or wrongly that the police have evidence against him. His wife is expecting a baby any time now. He turns up at his sister’s lodgings, asking her for all the money she has ... His sister gives him a hundred and thirty francs. What does he do with that sum?’

And Maigret pushed yesterday’s evening paper over to the American. It was the one that had published the photograph of Maigret himself placing his hand on Gérard Pardon’s shoulder.

‘Is that the boy?’

‘That’s him, yes. Working from this office last night, I sent out his description to all the police forces in France, and the frontiers are being watched. A hundred and thirty francs ...’

‘You think he’s innocent?’

‘I’m convinced that he didn’t kill either his aunt or his sister. Now if he’d asked for that sum of money before nightfall yesterday, I might have thought he wanted to buy a revolver and commit suicide ...’

‘But if he didn’t commit the murders?’

‘Exactly, Monsieur Spencer. That’s what I was getting at. There are innocents who have the soul of a guilty man, and guilty men who have the soul of an innocent ... Fortunately, when his sister gave him that hundred and thirty francs, the gunsmiths had shut up shop for the night. So I assume he was trying to get

away. In that case, how far can you go on a hundred and thirty francs? No further than Belgium ...'

He picked up his phone and asked for Criminal Records.

'Hello ... Maigret here. Who's this on the line? ... Oh, it's you, Jaminet ... Can you take another man with you, and bring your cameras ... Yes. Wait for me downstairs in a taxi.' And he added, to the American, 'We may be about to make an arrest.'

'You've discovered the murderer?'

'Possibly, but I'm not certain. To tell you the truth, I'm inclined to think that ... Will you wait for me here a minute, Monsieur Spencer?'

Maigret made for the Palais de Justice, taking the notorious short cut through the door that should have been bricked up so long ago ... and but for which Cécile might not have been murdered. It was just so useful ... All very well for people to have been saying so for ten years, twenty years ...

The inspector knocked on the door of the examining magistrate's office, but said he wouldn't sit down.

'I've only got a moment; there's someone waiting for me. I wanted to ask how awkward it would make things for you if I were to arrest a man who may be innocent? He's not a nice character, by the way, he's served a sentence on a vice charge and he won't have the nerve to complain ...'

'Well, in that case ... give me the name, and I'll make a note of it.'

'Charles Dandurand.'

Ten minutes later, Maigret and Spencer Oats joined the two specialists from Criminal Records in the taxi waiting on Quai des Orfèvres. A little after ten, the car stopped in Bourg-la-Reine, where the misty, drizzling rain made Juliette Boynet's apartment building look like a half-faded old photograph.

'Wait for me on the fifth-floor landing,' the inspector told the other two police officers.

He rang Dandurand's bell. The door was opened by Berger, who hadn't slept and whose eyelids were heavy with weariness. 'I suppose you haven't brought anything to eat?' he asked.

Monsieur Charles had taken off his detachable collar. He looked crumpled, like a man who has slept in his clothes, and he still wore his old kid slippers on his feet.

'I assume ...' he began.

'Don't assume anything, Monsieur Dandurand, because you'd almost certainly be wrong. In accordance with the warrant signed by the examining magistrate this morning, I am arresting you.'

'Oh.'

'Are you surprised?'

'No, I just feel it will make trouble for you.'

'Do you want to say anything before we set off for La Santé?'

'No, only that you've made a mistake.'

'You still don't know what you were doing yesterday in Juliette Boynet's bedroom, while I was making a telephone call down here?'

A bitter smile crossed Dandurand's unshaven face.

'You stay with him, Berger. Tell him to get dressed, and when he's ready take him to the cells at La Santé for the formalities ...'

He abruptly swung round, grabbed a girl lurking behind him by her thin shoulders and growled, 'As for you, Nouchi, if I catch you following me round the place again, I'll ...'

'Ooh, what will you do to me?' she asked in great excitement.

'You'll find out, and it won't be funny. Off you go!'

A little later he was opening the front door of the fifth-floor apartment.

'This is the place concerned, boys ... Careful, Monsieur Spencer, don't go into this room.'

'It's all right, we've already taken all the fingerprints in the apartment,' one of the photographers pointed out.

'Yes, the day after the crime. And the only prints found in Juliette Boynet's bedroom were her own and Cécile's. No prints left by a man, neither Gérard nor the disreputable character we've just left. However, last night, while I was telephoning from his study downstairs, he went into that bedroom. I'm sure of it because I heard him, but I don't know what he was doing there. He must have had very good reasons for risking something so compromising. I want you to find everything he touched ... so get down to work! Now you understand why I told you not to go in there, Monsieur Spencer.'

The specialists set up their equipment and began work. Hands in his pockets, Maigret was coming and going in the other rooms of the apartment.

'Not a very entertaining story, is it?' he commented. 'An avaricious old woman, obsessed with making money. A young girl, or rather a woman not in her first youth and without many natural advantages ... Come downstairs with me for a moment, will you?'

They reached Monsieur Charles' apartment just as the latter, in hat and overcoat, was about to leave with Inspector Berger.

'Don't worry about your possessions, Monsieur Dandurand. I'll look after the key to your front door myself. By the way, I suppose it won't take you long to find a lawyer to represent your interests, and he'll soon turn up here.'

So saying, he closed the door and went not into Dandurand's study this time, but into the former lawyer's bedroom.

'Sit down, Monsieur Spencer ... What do you hear?'

'Yes, I understand ... We can hear every word they say in the room above this one.'

'Exactly! I don't know how they construct modern buildings in America, but here they're no more soundproof than a cigar box. Never mind what our colleagues are saying upstairs ... concentrate on their footsteps. Try to follow their movements ...'

'I'd say ... Hmm, yes, that's much more difficult.'

'My own opinion precisely. Ah, hear that? One of them has laid hands on a drawer ... he's opening it. But could you say what piece of furniture the drawer is in?'

'That would be impossible.'

'So we've established one thing. In his own apartment, Dandurand could hear everything being said overhead ... He could follow, at least roughly, the comings and goings of visitors to Juliette Boynet. On the other hand, as for the details ... I just hope that young idiot Gérard hasn't thrown himself into the Seine!'

'Because he's innocent!'

'I told you that I thought so ... unfortunately, I'm not infallible. I also dwelt on the fact that an innocent man can often react as if he were guilty ... I hope Berthe has stayed with his wife. She could be giving birth any moment now.'

Above them, the Criminal Records men were dragging furniture over the floor.

'If you were a miser, Monsieur Spencer ...'

'We don't have any misers in America ... Being such a young nation, we haven't yet developed that fault, or shall we say that trait?'

'Then imagine that you're an old woman, an old Frenchwoman ... You own millions, but you live as frugally as any ordinary pensioner ...'

'That's quite difficult for me!'

'Well, make an effort. Your only pleasure in life is counting the banknotes representing your profits. This problem has been haunting me for the last three days, because a man's life depends on it. Depending on where exactly the money was invested, the name of the potential murderer changes ...'

'I suppose ...' the American began.

'What do you suppose?' asked Maigret, almost aggressively.

'If I were ... as you describe her ... I'd want to have my money always within my reach.'

'That's exactly what I thought ... But be careful. Although she wasn't in good health, Juliette Boynet could still get around her apartment. She stayed in bed until about ten in the morning, when her niece came in with her breakfast and the morning paper ...'

'Perhaps the money was hidden in her bed? I believe it's usual in France for people to sew their savings into their mattresses?'

'Except that after ten in the morning, Juliette moved to the sitting room and stayed there until evening. These last few weeks, she had eight hundred thousand francs in thousand-franc notes in the apartment. That amount of paper would take up quite a lot of space. Follow me closely ... only two people could know where the money was hidden. Her niece Cécile, who lived with the old lady ... her aunt kept all this from her, but she might have found out by chance ...'

'I understand that Monsieur Dandurand was the old woman's confidant?'

'But not a close enough confidant for her to reveal her hiding-place to him, believe me! A woman like Juliette Boynet would be suspicious of her own guardian angel ... However, as you confirm, sitting in this room, anyone can hear what's going on overhead. Shall we go upstairs? If anyone calls me here we'll hear the phone ringing.'

It was so damp outside that the banisters on the staircase were sticky. One of the piano teacher's pupils was going through her scales at length. The

Hungarians were having an argument, and they could hear Nouchi's piercing voice.

'How's it going, boys?'

'This is remarkable, sir.'

'What's remarkable?'

'Are you sure the man wasn't wearing rubber gloves?'

'I can prove that.'

'He walked over the rug ... but so far he doesn't seem to have touched anything, except the door handle. The only fingerprints we've found are yours.'

A strong flashlight was connected to the electric current. The photographic equipment changed the atmosphere of the room where Juliette Boynet had lived for so long.

'She used a walking-stick, didn't she?' the American said suddenly.

Maigret turned his head as abruptly as if an insect had stung him.

'Wait a minute ... The thing that ...'

What could the old woman have taken with her from her bedroom to the sitting room, from the sitting room to her bedroom, keeping it with her during meals in the dining room? Her walking-stick, of course. But you can't hide eight hundred thousand-franc notes in a walking-stick, even a hollow one!

The inspector's eyes went round the room again.

'What about that?' he suddenly asked, pointing to a small and very low piece of furniture, covered with old tapestry, a stool where Juliette Boynet could have rested her feet when she was sitting down. 'Any prints there?'

'No, sir.'

Maigret picked up the footstool and put it on the bed. His fingers slipped over the copper nails holding the tapestry cover in place, and he found that he could lift a kind of lid. In fact the footstool had been designed to contain hot coals, and under the lid there was a rectangular copper container.

There was a silence. Everyone was looking at a package wrapped in old newspaper and lying inside the container.

'Those eight hundred banknotes must be in there,' said Maigret at last, relighting his pipe. 'Look at that, Monsieur Spencer ... And don't mention this to your colleagues at the Institute of Criminology, because I'd be ashamed of myself! I looked inside the mattress, the base of the bed, I probed the walls, the

floor, the chimney ... and I didn't stop to think that an old woman with swollen legs, dragging herself around with a walking-stick, might have herself been followed from room to room by that preposterous little footstool! Go carefully with that newspaper! Have a good look at it, will you?'

And for ten minutes, oblivious to what was going on around him, Maigret applied himself to rewinding all the clocks, setting off a whole series of chimes.

'Finished, sir,' said one of his colleagues.

'And the prints are on it, I expect?'

'Yes, they are. We've counted eight hundred and ten notes.'

'I need envelopes and sealing wax.'

He saw the small fortune from the footstool safely sealed and telephoned the public prosecutor's office to send a suitably responsible person to take charge of it.

'Will you come with me, Monsieur Spencer?' Out of doors, he turned up the collar of his overcoat. 'We ought to have kept that taxi waiting for us. But believe it or not, the man I'm most afraid of at the Police Judiciaire is our accountant. I don't know if they're as fierce about expenses in the United States ... While we wait for a tram, why don't we have a drink in this bistro where the builders go for a snack? Oh, you've left your hat behind.'

'I never wear a hat,' said his companion.

Maigret took a long look at the American inspector's red hair, on which raindrops stood out like beads. There were certainly some things that were beyond his understanding!

'I'll have a calvados,' he said. 'How about you?'

'Can I get a glass of milk here?'

Was that what gave this man of thirty-five a complexion as pink as the moist muzzle of a young calf?

'In a large glass,' said Maigret, addressing the bistro manager.

'The milk?'

'No, the calvados.'

And Maigret patiently refilled his pipe. Had that cold fish Dandurand risked his head to put those eight hundred thousand francs back in the old woman's little footstool?



10.

They left the registry office. A gap-toothed clerk had initially replied to Maigret's questions by saying, in a bad-tempered tone, that he couldn't give the information required. Then he noticed the inspector's badge, and became so frantically eager to oblige that it took him twice as long as he should have needed to consult the voluminous registers.

The local town hall was neither old nor modern, just ugly: ugly as a whole, in its proportions and its materials, ugly in all its details. Its staff were coming out just as Maigret and his American companion were going in, because twelve noon was striking. The large man of dishevelled appearance, with three chins and a paunch that preceded him, and whom everyone was keen to greet, must have been the mayor of Bourg-la-Reine.

The inspector and his companion stopped to wait at the top of the short flight of steps, four or five in all, because a heavy shower was falling. The market, which stood in the shade of trees in the little square, was packing up. Stalls were being taken down. The muddy ground was littered with detritus. There was blood-red meat in the butcher's shop opposite, where a large, pink woman sat at the till. Children were being let out of a nearby school, and they rushed away, shouting. Many of them wore shoes with wooden soles. A green and white bus was coming along.

This wasn't Paris now, or a little provincial town or a village. Maigret glanced at his American companion, and their eyes met. Spencer Oats obviously understood, for he gave a slight smile – a smile that was rather clouded, like the scene before them.

'It's not always much cheerier than this back home either,' he murmured.

The visit they had just paid to the town hall was on business that any inspector or indeed any officer of lower rank could have transacted. Maigret had wanted to know, first, how long Charles Dandurand had been living in Juliette's apartment building.

The answer was exactly fourteen years. Before that he had lived in furnished accommodation in Rue Delambre, near Boulevard Montparnasse.

And Juliette's husband, Boynet the building contractor, had died fourteen and a half years ago.

Standing at the top of the steps down from the town hall, the two men waited for the worst of the rain to pass.

'Do you know, Monsieur Spencer, why criminals would rather deal with us than with the lawyers?'

'I guess I'm beginning to get some idea.'

'And remember we can use brute force – not as often as it's sometimes claimed, but more than an examining magistrate or a deputy public prosecutor ... It's just that in the course of investigations we've lived in the defendants' own world. We've been to their homes, we know their customs, their families and friends. This morning I was drawing a distinction between the criminal *before* and *after* he commits a crime. Well, what we want to know about is his life *before* he steps outside the law. When we hand him over to the lawyers, that's the end of him. He's broken with his life as an ordinary man, and almost always it's a final break. He's a criminal, that's all, and the lawyers treat him as such.'

With almost no transition, Maigret sighed, 'I'd give a good deal to know what Charles Dandurand was really doing in Juliette's bedroom. Putting those banknotes back, or ...? Oh, look, the rain is easing.'

They made a dash for it, the inspector with his hands in his pockets and his shoulders hunched, the American as casually as if he were strolling along in bright sunlight.

'Would you mind lunching in a bistro?'

'I'd be delighted. Our men at the embassy, or those who have been showing me around so far, haven't taken me anywhere but the big fancy restaurants yet.'

They took the tram to Porte d'Orléans and in passing glanced at the building that resembled a slab of Neapolitan ice cream, its brickwork turning black in the

rain.

'The difficult part,' said Maigret, 'is putting yourself in their place, thinking and feeling like them. Another handicap for the judge, who lives in too neutral an atmosphere. My own home isn't so very different from this place. Come in!'

Turning into a small street, Maigret had pushed open the door of a very simple restaurant, with a metal counter, marble-topped tables and sawdust on the floor. A rubicund man with broken veins on his face, wearing a blue cotton apron, came over to shake Maigret's hand.

'It's a long time since we saw you, Monsieur Maigret! I must tell my good lady. Mélanie! What can you offer Monsieur Maigret today?'

Mélanie came hurrying out of the kitchen, stomach first, wiping her hands.

'Oh, if only you'd phoned us first! Let's see ... there's coq au vin, and I had some nice-looking ceps brought in this morning ... does your friend like ceps?'

There were only a few regular customers in the bistro. The windows were misted up, and you couldn't see anything outside.

'The usual Beaujolais, Monsieur Maigret?'

Maigret went into a small phone kiosk, and the American, looking through the glass, saw that his face was grave and concerned.

'They haven't picked up that idiot Gérard yet,' he said, returning to their table. 'I'll look in on his wife this evening.'

'You said they were short of money in the household ...'

'We've done something about that, of course ... Well, there's a baby who I suppose will never know the circumstances in which it came into the world! ... Why the hell did Charles Dandurand ...'

The American felt that nothing else Maigret said was of any importance. He was solely occupied with the problem of Dandurand.

'Why Dandurand?' Maigret mused.

'If he killed the old woman ...' Spencer ventured to say.

'If he killed the old woman I'm an imbecile and I'll have to start my investigation all over again, Monsieur Spencer. First, why would he have killed her? She was worth more to him alive than dead ... He knew he couldn't inherit from her ... And as for stealing the eight hundred thousand francs in her apartment, well, you saw for yourself that he did no such thing. And how could he have done it? She says goodbye. She escorts him back to the door. I'm sure

that she locks it carefully. And she also bolts it, he says, and I believe him. She goes back to her bedroom. She undresses. She's already taken off one stocking and she is sitting on her bed when ... No, Monsieur Spencer, it wasn't Dandurand who went back up, opened the door of her apartment and ...

'Yet four days later, almost in my presence, he doesn't hesitate to let suspicion fall on him when he enters that bedroom ... to do what?

'And remember that the old woman's papers – her receipts, her certificates of ownership – everything that was in the sitting-room desk and in effect is of no value at all to the murderer, since he can't make any use of it without giving himself away – remember that all that has disappeared.

'On the other hand the banknotes, which in theory are anonymous, didn't leave their hiding place, or if they did briefly leave it they were returned ... do you like these ceps à la bordelaise?'

'Allow me to say, inspector, that you're not as observant as you might be, or you would have noticed me helping myself three times. As for the Beaujolais, I'm afraid it may make me a slightly inattentive companion this afternoon ...'

'Wait till you try the coq au vin! Mélanie was cook for twenty years to one of our ministers. He went to the bad, but he appreciated good cooking ... Would you have guessed that Juliette was once a rather beautiful woman? There's a photograph of her in the apartment ... I wonder if by any chance her husband was jealous ...'

These simple words were enough to lead him into a new deep abyss of reflection, from which he did not emerge until Mélanie appeared to ask if they liked her coq au vin. Maigret glanced at the door now and then.

'Are you expecting someone?'

'Yes, a gentleman whom I don't much like. It seems that he's been hanging around Quai des Orfèvres for a good two hours, so I asked him to come and see me here.'

A few minutes later a taxi drew up beside the pavement, and Maître Leloup, stout and self-important, paid the driver and came into the bistro.

'I've brought you what I promised,' he announced, putting his morocco leather briefcase on a free table. 'As you will see, the claims of my client, who is an honourable man, are not exaggerated.'

The lawyer couldn't have had lunch yet, but the inspector did not invite him to share their meal, or to take off his coat.

'I'll look at the material soon.'

'How are your inquiries going?'

'Slowly, Maître Leloup, slowly.'

'I'd like to point out a detail that may have escaped you ... And please note that I am not criticizing the methods that have won you a certain celebrity. I have sent someone trustworthy to Fontenay, to question persons of a certain age who knew Madame Boynet when she was a girl, and was still Juliette Cazenove.'

Maigret was eating steadily, as if indifferent to this gossip, and the American watched him with curiosity.

'I have learned,' said Maître Leloup, 'some things which will certainly surprise you ...'

At this the inspector murmured very quietly, 'Oh, I don't think so.'

'Juliette Cazenove was regarded as rather reckless when she was a girl – reckless with her body, to be more precise ...'

'And she was said to be Charles Dandurand's mistress, wasn't she?'

'Someone has told you?'

'No, but I thought as much. Dandurand was some ten years older than her ... even then, I imagine, he liked unripe fruit.'

'It was a scandal at the time.'

'But it didn't keep Juliette from marrying her building contractor and going to live with him in Paris. I know all that, Maître Leloup.'

'And what do you conclude?'

'I don't conclude anything. It's too soon for conclusions ... Wait! I bet that phone call is for me!'

And he hurried to the phone kiosk with a hopeful expression on his face. It was indeed for him, since he stayed on the phone for some time, and when he came back he looked relieved.

'Let's have some more of Mélanie's coq au vin,' he said to the proprietor.

You would have thought that he hadn't eaten any lunch yet. His appetite came back to him. He drank a full glass of Beaujolais and wiped his mouth on the back of his hand. His eyes were sparkling.

'They've picked up Gérard!' he said at last. 'Poor boy!'

‘Why do you say *poor boy*?’

‘Because he acted like the idiot he is. Let’s have another bottle, Désiré. Guess what? Yes, he got on a train for the Belgian border, as I foresaw. Once there, he saw some local gendarmes making a more thorough search of the carriages than usual ... whereupon he lost his head, climbed out of the train on the wrong track and started running across country, wading through clay and mud, with the gendarmes on his heels. He saw a farm and made for it. Where do you think they found him? Hiding in the lavatory. He struggled so hard and so long that they had to half knock him out. He’s on his way back to us ... he’ll be back in Paris at three-fifty.’

‘Has he confessed?’ asked Maître Leloup.

To which Maigret replied in a supposedly ingenuous tone, ‘Confessed what? Good heavens, I almost forgot the most important thing! Maître Leloup, would you be kind enough to send your client a telegram on my behalf? I’m wondering whether by any chance, given the good relations between your client and his aunt Boynet, she told him certain embarrassing things ... Well, how would I know? For instance, perhaps she gave him presents? You have no idea how interested I would be to know that!’

At last they were rid of the potentially shady lawyer and could enjoy Mélanie’s coffee at their leisure, together with the old Armagnac brought out by Désiré, who came from Gers and still had friends among the wine-growers there. They were now the only guests left in the neat, simple room with its steamed-up windowpanes. The table had been wiped clean, and they had placed the letters brought by the lawyer on it. They were all written on the black-bordered notepaper that old Juliette had used ever since she was widowed.

My dear cousins,

I have received your good wishes, and I send you mine, with my love. It is hard for an old woman like me to live with ungrateful people. When I think of all I did for my sister’s children, and how ...

Maigret read the letters one by one and passed them to his companion, who looked at them in turn. They were all alike. They were dated 2 or 3 January, written in reply to New Year greetings from the Monfils family.

... They’ll get their deserts, because if they think they’re going to inherit my fortune one day ...

And in another letter:

Gérard is good for nothing, and never comes to see me without asking for money ... as if I could manufacture it out of nothing!

Berthe fared no better.

... I'm glad she has left, because I was always expecting to see her in a condition, and that would have been a real scandal in this house ...

‘A condition?’ asked Monsieur Spencer, puzzled.

‘An ... er ... interesting condition. A discreet way of saying that she expected her niece to get pregnant.’

They were warm and felt good. The Armagnac perfumed the air and tickled their palates.

It's a terrible thing to be old and infirm and to think that all people want of me is my money ... I can't help thinking that I may have an accident one of these days ...

You may well be happy, living in your little town, without all the anxieties that make me ill.

Cécile pretends to be devoted to me, but she is more like her own brother than mine ...

There is in fact someone who owes me a great deal, but of whom I can't be too sure either ...

Maigret showed this passage to his companion.

‘She wasn’t sure of anyone,’ he murmured.

‘She was right, wasn’t she?’

‘Read the last bit.’

Luckily I am no more stupid than the rest of them, and I have taken precautions. If anything were to happen to me, I promise you that they won’t get away with it and find themselves well off.

“‘They’,” sighed Maigret. ‘She lumped everyone together, everyone who approached her, everyone she suspected of having an eye on her money, Monsieur Dandurand included. Do you begin to understand it?’

‘Understand what?’

Maigret smiled. ‘You’re right, I sound almost as vague as she does ...

Understand what, indeed? I should have asked if you begin to feel it. You must be disappointed if, as you said this morning, you were hoping to study my methods. I take you trudging round in the rain, I sweep you off to a very boring town hall, then I make you eat coq au vin ... How can I explain it to you? *I feel it ...* When Dandurand comes out of prison, he goes to live in furnished accommodation in Paris. He meets Juliette again; she isn’t widowed yet. What

was her husband like? All we have of him is his photographs. A man of about forty-five, tall, broad, with a certain presence ... So Juliette and Dandurand resume their old relationship. I expect they meet in the former lawyer's lodgings in Rue Delambre ... The husband dies, and Dandurand soon makes his way into the apartment building owned by his mistress, whom he continues to see only in secret ...'

'I don't understand the reason for the secrecy,' objected the American.

There was a long silence. Maigret looked at his glass, finally sighed, swallowed some Armagnac and said, abruptly changing the subject, 'We'll see! Désiré, the bill, old fellow ... And if I can't get any work done this afternoon then you and your wife are to blame ... I do wonder what that bastard went into Juliette's bedroom for. Help me out, can't you, Monsieur Spencer? Think, if we can only find a satisfactory answer to that question ...'

Like a model secretary, Spencer Oats was putting the black-bordered letters scattered over the table in order.

'The precautions,' he ventured to suggest.

'The precautions?' Maigret frowned. Yes, hadn't the old miser spoken in one of her letters about taking precautions against those who were after her money? She distrusted everyone, including her former lover.

'Did you enjoy your lunch, Monsieur Maigret?' asked the down-to-earth Mélanie, who had more than one celebrity among her clientèle and treated them all with maternal familiarity. 'I copied the recipe out once for Madame Maigret. Has she ever tried it?'

The inspector wasn't listening. Hand in his trouser pocket, where he had just put his change, he was staring at Mélanie's apron as if in suspense, and finally said, 'I wonder why Cécile is dead. Do you see what I mean, Monsieur Spencer? All the rest can be explained, it was easy. But Cécile is dead, and ... Forgive me, Mélanie. It was an excellent lunch, thank you, and if he doesn't have any other memories my friend here can tell them about it in Philadelphia ...'

He was in a state of great agitation. On the pavement he said only a single word, and once they reached the corner of Avenue d'Orléans he raised his arm to hail a taxi.

'Quai des Orfèvres, and fast.'

He had to change his mind on the way. ‘No, go to Gare du Nord first. The Arrivals area, where the main lines come in. It’s later than I thought.’

Was it the effect of the coq au vin, the Beaujolais, a melting mocha gâteau made by Mélanie and Désiré’s Armagnac? In any case, Spencer Oats was looking affectionately at his heavyweight companion. He felt as if for some hours he had been watching a progressive transformation. The inspector, wrapped in his overcoat, bowler hat tilted backwards on his head, the stem of his pipe clenched between his teeth, was inhabiting the lives of all the characters in this case he was trying to illuminate: the unpleasant ones, the mean ones and the sympathetic ones.

‘His wife could be having the baby at this very moment ...’

He was pink-cheeked as if he were the husband himself. Maigret was there in the train between two gendarmes, where Gérard should be. He was close to Gérard’s wife, along with Berthe. He was in the apartment building in Bourg-la-Reine, his feet on old Juliette’s tapestry-covered footstool, and at the same time he was a floor below, where Monsieur Charles could hear everything that went on overhead.

From time to time, at a crowded crossroads, Maigret saw the pale face of an electric clock, or the white baton of a police officer in a cape, and he counted the minutes, leaning forward and half-rising from his seat, as if to relieve the taxi of his weight and let it go faster.

They reached Gare du Nord just in time, almost too late. There was a group of curious onlookers, and a police officer was calling, ‘Move along, please.’

Two gendarmes were pushing a thin young man ahead of them. His trousers were muddy, his raincoat was torn, and he was lashing out as far as the handcuffs would allow, like a horse between the shafts. And so far as the public were concerned Gérard, feverish and belligerent, was the incarnation of the hunted criminal everyone was after!

His lips quivered when he caught sight of the inspector.

‘Think you’re so clever, don’t you?’

‘Get into this taxi, gentlemen,’ Maigret told the gendarmes, showing them his badge.

They didn’t wait to be asked twice. They were feeling hot; all the way they’d lived in fear that their prisoner would throw himself out of the carriage door.

'I don't suppose anyone's thought of my wife for a moment!'

Large tears welled out from under his eyelids, but he couldn't wipe them away because of the handcuffs.



11.

‘What’s your brigade?’

‘Feignies, sir.’

‘There’s a train leaving at seven minutes past five ... I expect you’d rather spend the night at home than in Paris? Give me your record slips, boys.’

Maigret got the taxi to stop beside the pavement on the corner of Rue La Fayette. Passers-by, leaning forward to keep their umbrellas above their heads in the gusts of wind, glanced curiously at the car with the gendarmes in it. The inspector put their record slips on his knees and signed them. The two gendarmes got out and disappeared into a bar. Then Maigret slid aside the pane between the passengers and the driver and spoke to the latter in an undertone. When the car had begun moving again, he took a small key out of his pocket and removed Gérard Pardon’s handcuffs.

‘You’re going to do me the favour of keeping quiet, aren’t you? A few dozen more innocent men like you, and the Police Judiciaire would have to recruit three times its present force.’

Gérard, who was watching the streets go past as if he hadn’t seen Paris for years, shuddered, and his ever-suspicious gaze was turned on the inspector.

‘Why did you say “innocent men”?’

Maigret could not suppress a smile. ‘Are you going to change tack and claim to be guilty now?’

‘If you think I’m innocent, then why did you have me arrested?’

‘And if you really are innocent why did you run for it? Why, at the sight of the gendarmes, did you gallop away like a foal and shut yourself up in the smallest

room, where no one spends hours on end from choice?’

Spencer Oats, leaning slightly back, was taking all this in with the beatific if vague smile of those who have dined well and are now indulgently watching the twists and turns of a theatrical spectacle. The taxi was as dimly lit as a lantern with its glass in need of cleaning. Through the windows, figures seemed distorted, and the umbrellas thronging the pavements took on bizarre shapes. When the car stopped at a roadblock you could see the passengers in a bus sitting as still as waxworks in a museum.

‘Listen, young man … I know who killed your aunt.’

‘That’s not true.’

‘I know who killed your aunt, and I’ll prove it to you in the near future.’

‘But that’s impossible,’ insisted Gérard, shaking his head. ‘No one can know ...’

‘No one except you, am I right? All the same, *I’d bet that you were asleep when it happened!*’

This time Cécile’s brother shivered and looked at the inspector in terror, unable to believe his ears.

‘There! As you can see ...’

‘But ... but where are we going?’

Through the film of rain, Pardon had just recognized Place de la Bastille. The one-way system meant that the car was going along Rue Saint-Antoine to bypass Place des Vosges.

‘Listen carefully. A reward of twenty thousand francs has been offered to anyone who identifies the murderer. For reasons that need not concern you, the Police Judiciaire would not dream of accepting that reward in any case ...’

‘But ... you must know that I ...’

‘Shut up! I believe that your wife is still at your lodgings, with your sister Berthe keeping her company. Since you have a certain distaste for the maternity hospital, here’s the authorization for a payment on account, to be set against the twenty thousand for which you are about to qualify. Go on, get in there quickly! We’ll wait for you in this taxi. Suppose Cécile had been able to give you enough money, what hospital were you thinking of?’

‘The Clinique Saint-Joseph.’

'Right, Berthe will only have to take your wife to the Clinique Saint-Joseph, and you can join them there later this evening.'

Somewhat surprised, the American looked from one to the other of them.

'And don't do anything silly, will you?'

The car had stopped, and Gérard, dazed and perhaps still suspicious, hesitated.

'Oh, go on, you stupid idiot!'

During the following ten minutes, Maigret smoked his pipe without saying a word, and at the moment when Pardon reappeared on the threshold of the building into which Maigret had sent him, mopping his eyes, the inspector contented himself with a glance at Spencer Oats.

'Quai des Orfèvres, driver ... come to think of it, Gérard, when did you last eat?'

'They gave me a sandwich in the train, but I'm not hungry ... I'm thirsty rather than hungry. The ... I ...'

His throat felt so tight that he had difficulty articulating his words.

They stopped once again, outside a bar, and Maigret himself had no objection to drinking a beer, by way of helping down the coq au vin and above all the mocha gâteau.

Ten minutes later, he was adding all the fuel to his stove that it would take, and he switched on the desk lamp with the green shade.

'Sit down and take off that raincoat; it's soaked. Sit in front of the stove to get your trousers dry ... how on earth can anyone get into such a state?'

It was not yet fully dark outside. The garlands of lights marking out the course of the Seine could be seen through the window. The Police Judiciaire was at its busiest at this time of day; you could hear doors opening and closing, footsteps hurrying along the corridor, telephones ringing and the constant clicking of typewriters.

'Torrence! I had a list of all the people who came to the Police Judiciaire on the morning of 7 October drawn up. Go and find it for me, please.'

Finally sitting down himself and choosing a pipe larger than the others from those on his desk, Maigret turned to Gérard and began.

'What exactly did you drink in your aunt's apartment? Wait ... I'll jog your memory. You had no financial resources left at all, right? You knew that your wife could give birth at any time now, and there weren't even any baby clothes

ready for the child. You were in the habit of getting money from your sister Cécile ... oh, come on, you needn't bother to lower your head. Unfortunately, Cécile could supply only very small sums taken from the housekeeping money, because your aunt didn't part with her funds easily ... usually you watched for your sister in the street, but that evening you went up the stairs, got into the apartment and hid in Cécile's room while she was attending to Madame Boynet ... is all that correct?'

'Yes, absolutely correct.'

'When your aunt was in the dining room eating her dinner, your sister came into the kitchen. The door between her room and the kitchen was ajar, and you told her that you needed money at any price ...'

'I told her I was at the end of my tether, and rather than see my wife ...'

'Exactly. Not only was Cécile sorry for you, *you also frightened her ... It was a kind of emotional blackmail ...*'

'I'd decided to kill myself ...'

'After killing your wife, you idiot!'

'I swear, inspector, I'd have done it. It was already three days since ...'

'Oh, be quiet. Your sister couldn't talk to you at that moment, because of the risk that the old woman might overhear ... Cécile looked after your aunt as usual, sat and ate with her. No doubt she asked her for money, and I suppose your aunt refused? When Madame Boynet had gone to bed, as I assume she did, it was too late for you to leave the building; the front door giving access to the street was closed. You'd have had to ask for the cord that would open it, but the concierge could have mentioned that to your aunt, the owner of the building. So Cécile took you something to eat in her room ... what was it?'

'Bread and cheese.'

'And what did you drink?'

'First a glass of wine ...'

'Anything else?'

'Yes, a cup of the tisane that Cécile drank every evening. She suffered from stomach trouble. She told me to drink it instead ... I was crying, I was terribly upset, and I felt like vomiting.'

'So Cécile got you to sleep in her bed ...'

'Yes. I talked to her about Hélène for a little while, and then – I don't know how it happened, but I fell asleep.'

Maigret exchanged an eloquent glance with the American.

'You went to sleep because you had drunk the tisane meant for your sister. On evenings when your aunt was going to be visited by Monsieur Charles, she put a strong dose of bromide into it. And everything followed naturally on from that apparently insignificant chance event ... if Cécile had drunk the tisane, as might have been expected, no doubt your aunt would still be alive, and in that case so would your sister.'

Maigret got to his feet, went over to the window and stood there with his back to his office, as if he were talking to himself.

'Cécile, sitting in an armchair so as to let you have her bed, can't get to sleep, and for very good reasons. Old Madame Boynet waits for the time of her meeting, puts on her dressing gown and her stockings and, sure that no one will hear her, goes to wait by the door for Monsieur Charles. All it took was for you to have an upset stomach, and for the wrong person to drink that tisane, and then ... then the two accomplices ...'

'Why do you say *accomplices*?' cried the young man, who had turned pale.

'Weren't they accomplices? Come along, let me continue ... I think it's rather too warm in here now ...'

He went over to open a door into a neighbouring office.

'The two accomplices, as I was saying, are in the sitting room, where a single night-light is on ... Cécile, who has heard a sound, slips into the hall or the dining room, where she can overhear them without being seen. They are talking in low voices about their business, which is not of a very edifying nature. The brothel in Béziers ... the brothel here in Paris in Rue d'Antin. I can imagine poor Cécile's state of mind. It must have taken her some time to understand what kind of business they were discussing. Then Monsieur Charles hands the fifty thousand francs over to his old friend ... She closes the desk but keeps the money in her hand ... She takes the former lawyer to the door. She bolts it after him and goes back to her bedroom with a sigh of satisfaction. It has been a good day. Her nest egg has grown again. She opens the tapestry-covered footstool that does duty as her safe, and Cécile, with her eye to the keyhole, sees all those

wads of banknotes. As for you, you're still asleep ... Think hard before you reply to this question. *Were you woken by any unusual noise?*'

'No, it was my sister who ...'

'Wait. Your aunt is getting undressed ... she has already taken off one stocking when Cécile, panic-stricken after your threats of suicide ...'

'I couldn't have foreseen what would happen,' groaned Gérard.

'That's what everyone says after the event ... But however that may be, your sister suddenly rushes in to face the old woman, who takes fright ... The sight of the banknotes, representing a positive fortune, gives her courage. She asks for money again ... This time she isn't begging. She almost threatens your aunt ...

Neither of the two women suspects that, one floor below them, Monsieur Charles, surprised and alarmed, can hear everything that is going on ... I suppose that your aunt is calling your sister names – she believes that Cécile is indebted to her – once again she holds forth about all that she, Juliette, has done for her and the rest of your family. Perhaps she threatens to call for help?'

'No ... it wasn't like that at all,' said the young man slowly.

'Then tell me about it!'

'I don't know exactly what time it was ... I heard my name being spoken several times ... it was very difficult for me to wake up and above all to understand. I felt dazed, as if I'd been drinking too much. Cécile was sitting on the edge of the bed ...'

"Gérard!" she cried. "Gérard! What's wrong with you? You must listen to me."

'She was very calm, calmer than usual. I thought she must be feeling ill, because there were dark rings under her eyes, and her face was pale. She was speaking in a low voice, pronouncing her words distinctly.'

"Gérard ... I've just killed our aunt."

'Then she sat there without moving for a long time, staring at the floor.'

'I got up ... I meant to rush into my aunt's bedroom.'

"No, stay here ... You mustn't ..." she said.'

'She was thinking of the fingerprints,' said Maigret. He remembered the motionless figure of Cécile waiting for hours in the Aquarium.

'That's what she said ... she told me how it had happened ... Aunt Juliette was sitting on the edge of her bed. When she heard the noise, she had put her

hand under the pillow where she kept her revolver overnight, because she was terrified of intruders ...

“It’s you!” she said, when she recognized Cécile. “Is this your idea of sleeping? You’ve been spying on me, admit it!”

“Listen, aunt! I asked you just now for a little money for Gérard, or rather for his wife who’s about to have a baby ...”

“Go back to bed ...” said our aunt.

“You’re rich ... I know that now! You must listen to me ... Gérard will kill himself unless ...”

“Oh, so your good-for-nothing brother is here, is he?”

‘My aunt tried to sit upright without letting go of the revolver ... Cécile was so frightened that she took a couple of steps forward, seized one of my aunt’s arms and said ...

“You must give me some money ...”

‘My aunt fell back ... she struggled, tried to catch hold of the revolver again, and it was then that my sister squeezed her neck ...’

‘In cold blood,’ said Maigret. His voice was unexpectedly resonant.

Yes, he had been wrong to imagine a stormy scene. Cécile had not lost control of herself. She was the worm who had finally turned. She had been resigned to her fate for years and years, without even realizing it, because humility came so naturally to her. In the end it hadn’t taken much – the sight of that mound of banknotes, the certainty that her aunt had been deceiving and exploiting her all along ...

‘Go on, young man.’

‘We stayed like that for a long time, saying nothing ... Cécile left me for a moment to go and make quite sure that Aunt Juliette was really dead ...

‘Later, when she opened her mouth, it was to say, “We must tell the police.”’

There was silence in Maigret’s office too, invaded as it was by dusk in the grey atmosphere. The green lampshade cast strange reflections that seemed to be engraved on the faces of those present. Maigret’s pipe crackled slightly.

He could imagine the brother and sister, crushed by their stupor in the silent apartment, at the top of the large building beside the main road. Below them, in his own room, Monsieur Charles, panic-stricken, listening to the faintest murmur

...

“If I leave now ...”

And Maigret thought of Cécile looking at her brother. The police would never believe that Gérard had nothing to do with the crime. They sat there in pain, huddling together as if tired after a long race.

Should she go and ask for the cord to open the front door? The concierge wouldn't fail to look through her peephole to see who was being let out of the building at such an hour. All the clocks in the apartment struck, one by one. Every time, the brother and sister shivered.

“Listen, Gérard ... Tomorrow I'll go to see Detective Chief Inspector Maigret. I'll tell him all about it ... You must take advantage of the moment when the concierge goes out to the dustbins to get away from here and go home ...”

It was a strange kind of vigil! They were as cut off from the rest of the world as those emigrants that can be seen sitting on the ground, surrounded by their bundles, in the waiting rooms of railway stations or on the decks of ships.

‘Which of you,’ asked Maigret, relighting his pipe, ‘thought of opening the desk and looking at the papers inside it?’

‘It was Cécile ... much later. She had just made us two cups of coffee, because I was still feeling numb ... We were in the kitchen, and suddenly she murmured: “So long as that man doesn't come back.” And she added, “But all the same I told the inspector that someone was coming into this apartment by night. He wouldn't believe me, but now ...”’

Maigret looked at the rectangle of the window and clenched his teeth on the stem of his pipe.

‘And she said: “God knows whether, when we're separated ...”’

So Cécile had calmly suggested taking the papers out of the desk. She didn't for a moment think of running away with the money, or taking some of it for her brother, who needed money so much.

‘Did you read those documents?’ asked the inspector.

‘Yes.’

At that moment Maigret went over to the door that he had opened slightly a little earlier.

‘You might be more comfortable in here, Monsieur Dandurand ... From this point on, I think my questions will be mainly addressed to you.’

For Monsieur Charles was installed in the next room, with an inspector guarding him. He made a remarkable entrance. His collar and tie had been removed, and even his shoelaces. It was two days since he had shaved. His wrists were handcuffed together in front of him.

‘You can stand, can’t you?’ Maigret asked him. ‘Not too tired?’

Gérard had jumped to his feet, suspecting a trap. ‘What the ...?’

‘Calm down, Pardon ... and carry on with your story. I wanted Monsieur Dandurand to hear it. Right, so you were sitting beside the desk, you and your sister, examining those papers. A number of them were business paperwork: receipts, leases, statements of accounts ...’

‘There were letters as well.’ As Gérard said that, he looked at the former lawyer as if, in spite of the handcuffs, he feared a blow.

‘Love letters, am I right?’ asked Maigret.

At this, Dandurand raised his voice.

‘Just a moment! May I ask if this is some kind of confrontation?’

‘Exactly as you say, Monsieur Dandurand.’

‘In that case I want, I insist on having my lawyer present, as I am legally entitled to request.’

‘His name, please?’

‘Maître Planchard.’

‘Torrence! Torrence!’ Maigret called. ‘Will you telephone Maître Planchard, please? Or rather, wait ... at this time of day he’s probably in court in the Palais ...’

‘He’s making a plea in Courtroom 11,’ said Monsieur Charles.

‘Go off to Courtroom 11, then, and bring him back to me ... or if the case he’s involved in isn’t over, get him to ask for an adjournment. Give my name.’

For nearly thirty minutes silence reigned in Maigret’s office; the slightest movement broke the absolute calm like a pebble thrown into a pond.

‘Sit down, Maître Planchard. I won’t conceal it from you that I’m probably going to ask the examining magistrate to have your client arraigned on a charge of premeditated murder ... We’re listening, Pardon. You were speaking of love letters just now. If I’m not mistaken, those letters must date from about fifteen years ago.’

‘I don’t know. They weren’t dated.’

A triumphant smile from Maître Planchard, who was already acting as if he were in court. Here Maigret turned to Spencer Oats. ‘You’ll remember our visit to that unattractive town hall in Bourg-la-Reine?’

And then, looking at Gérard again, ‘What did the letters say? One moment ... we must first establish an important point. Am I correct in thinking that in view of the gravity of their contents, your sister decided to bring them to me at the same time as handing herself in as a prisoner? And she put them in her bag, along with all the business papers that the two of you found in the desk?’

‘Yes, that’s correct.’

‘In that case,’ said the lawyer, addressing himself to Maigret, ‘I must ask you to produce those documents.’

‘Wait a moment, please, Maître Planchard.’ And Maigret saw a smile hovering round Monsieur Charles’ lips. ‘I wouldn’t rejoice too soon, Dandurand. I’m well aware that you returned to your apartment in possession of that correspondence, which was so compromising that you destroyed it. *But don’t forget that you took advantage of a phone call that removed me from your vicinity in order to go into Madame Boynet’s bedroom ...* Very well, young Gérard, we’re listening. Tell us first how those letters began ...’

‘With the words “My darling”.’

All of a sudden Maigret seemed to be amused. ‘I’ll interrupt you again, just for long enough to tell my American colleague, who may be getting an unfortunate idea of amorous relationships in France, that at the time when those letters were written, Madame Boynet was fifteen years younger ... she may not have been in the first flush of youth, but nor was she the scarecrow with a walking-stick of recent years ... How many letters were there, Gérard?’

‘About thirty. Most of them were just notes ... “Tomorrow, you know where” ... “Kisses, your ...”’

‘They were signed?’

‘With the letter C.’

Monsieur Charles, who had not been invited to sit down, never took his eyes off the young man. His face was ashen, but he was still far from losing his self-assurance.

‘A letter of the alphabet proves nothing,’ objected Maître Planchard. ‘If those notes are to appear as evidence, I shall have to call on an expert graphologist.’

‘They won’t be appearing as evidence – not *those* notes, anyway. We’re listening, Gérard. I expect some of the notes were longer?’

‘Yes, four or five real letters.’

‘Tell us what you remember about them.’

‘I do remember that one of them said: “Be brave, you will soon be delivered, and we shall be left in peace at last.”’

Here Maître Planchard laughed heartily. ‘Delivered? The lady was pregnant, then?’

‘No, sir. The lady was torn between a husband and a lover. That letter was written by the lover.’

‘So the husband was ill?’

‘That’s what you will have to establish. Go on, young man.’

Thrown off balance by all the eyes turned on him, Gérard stammered, ‘I do remember another passage. “You see that he hasn’t noticed anything, so be patient. It will be better for us not to meet during the next few days … As for the actual dosage, we must count on a minimum of two weeks. Going any faster would be dangerous …”’

‘I don’t follow this,’ said Maître Planchard, coughing.

‘I’m sorry about that on your account, sir.’

‘And don’t forget that I shall be waiting for the documents concerned to be produced. Allow me to say that I think it very imprudent of you to bank on …’

Here Maigret said smoothly and quietly, ‘If you insist, I shall call for the exhumation of the late Joseph Boynet, and an examination of what is left of him after fifteen years … You are probably aware, Maître Planchard, that most poisons, in particular those that can be administered in small doses, like arsenic, can be traced long after …’

But here Torrence interrupted him, placing on his desk the list of those who had come to see the Police Judiciaire on the morning of the day when Cécile was murdered.



12.

‘You must be tired of standing, Dandurand ... Get him a chair, Torrence. I saw Monsieur Charles looking a little unsteady on his feet a few moments ago.’

‘You are wrong, inspector. I am still waiting to hear the smallest shred of evidence that ...’

‘Oh, come on, show a little patience! Your lawyer, Maître Planchard, never knew old Juliette, so it may be useful to give him a brief description of her ... may I, Maître Planchard?’

The lawyer made a vague gesture and lit a cigarette.

‘As a young girl, still bearing her maiden name of Cazenove, Juliette was already Dandurand’s mistress in Fontenay-le-Comte, and it was the talk of the little town ... Mâitre Dandurand, as he was then, had not yet been found guilty in a case concerning the abuse of minors. He was much younger at that time, and I can imagine that he had some attractions ... but all the same Juliette, a member of a family without financial means, did not turn down the chance of a good marriage in the person of Joseph Boynet, and to make sure of it, nor did she hesitate to sacrifice her sister by persuading her to combine her own dowry with Juliette’s.

‘I don’t know what she expected of Paris and life in a building contractor’s household. But there she was in Bourg-la-Reine with a jealous husband, living a life devoid of luxury and brilliance.

‘Years passed, and meanwhile her former lover Dandurand was growing older in Fontenay, although his passion for young girls, and then for very young girls, was as strong as ever.

'I'll skip the next bit, shall I? Two years in prison ... not such a big deal, all things considered.

'Then, one fine day, there he is in Paris, living in Rue Delambre in furnished accommodation, for ever debarred not only from the registers of his profession but from the world of decent people.

'Where do they meet again? It doesn't really matter. Anyway, they become lovers once more. And they begin to feel that the husband is in the way.

'Particularly in Juliette's way, I feel sure of that ... perhaps she is the first to have the idea of getting rid of a husband who prevents her from living as she would like.

'Her lover advises her, as his letters show.'

'The letters that I'm challenging you to produce,' interrupted the lawyer, looking through his file.

'The letters that I shall not be producing, because they caused your client to commit another crime, yes, that's right.'

'In that case ...' Maître Planchard made a grand gesture, as if he were in court, sweeping the air with the wide sleeves of his black gown.

'Patience, my dear sir ... The husband finally dies. He ate and drank to excess, and he also overworked, so the doctor feels sure that a heart attack carried him off. And it is then ...'

Maigret paused, looked at Monsieur Charles, then at Spencer Oats, and gave the hint of a smile steeped in irony.

'It is then that our Juliette changes almost overnight into an obsessive old woman. Perhaps the man who was her accomplice still attracts her, but he also frightens her ... She trusts no one and nothing, because now she knows how easily people can die. She becomes a miser ... Monsieur Charles moves into the same building, indeed into the apartment just below hers, but she has become careful of her reputation and doesn't see him except outside the house. Two nieces and a nephew land on her out of nowhere ... Later, her legs prevent her from going out, and so that she can see her accomplice by night she takes the precaution of sending Cécile to sleep by administering a strong bromide ... If Cécile had not had such a delicate stomach, if she hadn't drunk a tisane every night, who knows what ...

‘Madame Boynet kept her old letters locked in the desk in the sitting room. Dandurand makes lucrative if unedifying investments for her. Yesterday’s lover has become an avaricious, powerless old woman, and here we are in the presence of a particularly unpleasant kind of substitute family. She manages to put off the nephew and one of the nieces ... good riddance! But poor Cécile, born with the soul of either a slave or a saint, clings on.’

‘May I ask you a question, inspector?’ It was the lawyer. ‘On what do you base your ...’

‘I’ll tell you in a moment, Maître Planchard. Meanwhile, I’ll ask you to try to follow me ... So love has changed to avarice. One passion chases out another. It takes a chance incident, almost an accident ... It takes a tisane drunk by the wrong person to set off the tragedy ...

‘Down in his apartment, Dandurand has heard everything. He knows that above his head two young people are no longer in the dark ... He knows that Cécile has decided to come here to the Police Judiciaire and tell me everything, bringing the documents ...

‘Can he go up to the fifth floor in the middle of the night, knock on the door and prevent ... Well, you can’t have slept very well, Dandurand!’

Dandurand didn’t bat an eyelid. On the contrary, for a moment a smile, yet again, stretched his cold lips.

‘Early in the morning, when the concierge is busy with the dustbins out in the yard, brother and sister come downstairs ... Through the door that he has opened just a crack, Dandurand sees them pass. If only Cécile had been alone! But you don’t attack two people at once.

‘Out in the street they separate. Dandurand follows Cécile into the fog, hoping that he can manage to snatch the bag containing the documentary evidence of guilt while she is on her way.

‘The tram isn’t a good place for that. From the Pont Saint-Michel to the Police Judiciaire, no good chance turns up.

‘And now she is on the stairs ... What can save Monsieur Charles at this point?

‘Just one thing: the time. It isn’t quite eight in the morning yet. I am still at home. That day, for no reason, or perhaps to savour the first fog of the winter, I

decide to walk to work, while Cécile is waiting for me in what we call the Aquarium.

‘Dandurand prowls round ...’

‘Excuse me, inspector.’ It was the lawyer again. ‘But once more I must return to my question: do you have evidence, do you have witnesses?’

‘I have before my eyes, Maître Planchard, the list of all those who turned up at the Police Judiciaire that morning, and I have just ticked at least three names on that list ... You ought to understand me, since you are to some extent in the same line of business. It would be too compromising for Dandurand to come upstairs and speak to Cécile himself. She knows everything and wouldn’t for the world follow him.

‘But suppose someone from the underworld comes by, from that underworld of which Monsieur Charles has become one of the luminaries ...

‘And suppose he accosts his acquaintance ... “Listen, in that waiting room there’s a girl who mustn’t see the inspector today ... She doesn’t know you. I badly need you to say something to her.”

‘Don’t forget that Dandurand knows the corridors of Quai des Orfèvres and the Palais de Justice as well as we do.

“Find a pretext to get me on the other side of that glazed door ...”

‘Gentlemen, there is no other way things could have happened, and so ... The accomplice doesn’t know he’s taking part in a crime, or he might hesitate, and I feel sure that at the moment he isn’t very proud of himself ... However, this drama is played out.

“You wanted to see Detective Chief Inspector Maigret?”

‘I have just passed by ... Cécile is waiting. She confidently follows her improvised guide. And once past the glazed door ... Admit it, Dandurand, it happened like that, *because it couldn’t have happened in any other way!*

‘She is terrified by the sight of you ... The door of the broom cupboard is close ... you push her, she resists ... Before snatching the bag that she is defending, you strike her, and then ...’

‘I’m still waiting to hear the evidence, inspector.’

The lawyer, who had been making copious notes, lost none of his composure. Lawyers are not staking their own lives in court.

After giving his transatlantic colleague a very small sign, Maigret murmured, ‘Suppose I were to replace witnesses by a letter?’

‘A letter from the man who took the aforesaid Cécile to my client?’

‘*A letter from your client himself, my dear Maître Planchard.*’

Dandurand was hard as steel.

‘I’m waiting for you to let me see it,’ murmured the lawyer.

‘And I,’ sighed Maigret, ‘am waiting for it to be found.’

‘Which means that all this is ...’

‘Just a set of assumptions, yes, I admit that. ... All the same, there was a very good reason for Monsieur Charles to go into Juliette’s bedroom when I wasn’t with him ... Specialists have been searching that room since midday. I don’t know whether you’ve ever had to study the mentality of old ladies? They are the most distrustful creatures in the world. If she kept most of her letters in the sitting-room desk, then you may well think that ...’

Monsieur Dandurand laughed. Everyone looked at him.

To be honest, at that moment Maigret was close to thinking that he had lost the game. He was clinging to a single cause for hope. Hadn’t Juliette Boynet said, in one of her letters to Monfils, that if anything happened to her ...

The inspector had staked everything on this one throw of the dice. He wasn’t yet ready to believe that in the few minutes Dandurand had spent alone in that bedroom he ...

And didn’t the fact that he had gone into the room, had opened the tapestry footstool and touched the bundles of banknotes without taking them, even if it meant leaving his fingerprints on them, didn’t it mean that he was looking for something that mattered more to him?

Had the old woman been stupid enough to leave the final document in the apartment?

Suppose Maître Leloup hadn’t sent that telegram to Monfils? Suppose Monfils had been out fishing, out hunting, anywhere but at home? Suppose ...

The telephone rang. Maigret positively pounced on it. ‘Hello? Yes ... Ah well. Carry on.’

When he hung up, Spencer Oats saw that there could be no other solution: the searches in the Bourg-la-Reine apartment building hadn’t come up with any results.

‘Allow me to point out, detective chief inspector, that ...’

‘Point out anything you like. In the present situation ...’

‘All your hypotheses are based on a letter that doesn’t exist, and in those circumstances, my client is legally entitled to ...’

The telephone again.

‘Hello? Good! ... Three or four hours? ... Yes, he’s here ... I’ll send him round to you ...’ And he turned to Gérard. ‘You’d better go and join your wife. It sounds to me as if you’ll soon be a proud father.’

‘Detective chief inspector, I will continue to point out ...’

Maigret looked at the lawyer without replying and winked at the American, who followed him out into the corridor.

‘I’m beginning to think,’ he began, ‘that this investigation, the one you wanted to take part in ... Well, no doubt I’m going to look a fool, and you will go back to the United States with a pathetic opinion of my methods ... although I’m sure, as I hope you understand, I’m sure that ...’ And, abruptly changing the subject, Maigret said, ‘Oh, let’s go and have a beer, shall we?’

He led his companion out, casting a gloomy glance as he passed at the Aquarium, where two or three people were waiting.

They walked past the walls of the Palais de Justice and plunged into the warm calm of the Brasserie Dauphine, which smelled of beer drawn from the cask.

‘Two beers, please ... big ’uns!’

‘What do you mean by “big ’uns”?’ asked the American.

‘Glasses for regular customers only – they hold a litre.’

They went back, their stomachs pleasantly replete, by the same route.

‘I could have sworn ...’ muttered Maigret. ‘Ah, well, too bad! If I have to begin all over again, so be it!’

Spencer Oats felt as embarrassed as if he were trying to think up a brand new way of expressing condolences.

‘Do you understand? I know that psychologically I’m right ... it’s impossible that ...’

‘Suppose Dandurand found the letter ahead of you?’

‘A woman is always more cunning than her lover,’ pronounced Maigret. ‘And old Juliette ...’

He climbed the dusty staircase, where trails of moisture were shining. A man was waiting for them, dignified and self-important, with a briefcase under his arm.

'Detective chief inspector, I hope you can explain to me ...' he began.

Maigret's dislike of Maître Leloup had vanished at once. He flung himself on the lawyer as if he were a long-lost friend with whom he was now reunited.

'The telegram? Why didn't he send it straight to me here? ... Quick, let me see it ...'

'Here you are, but I don't know that you'll be able to make anything of it, and I'm even wondering whether, pending further information, I ought not to ...'

But Maigret had snatched it from Leloup's hands.

Tell Inspector Maigret only present received is photo of late aunt stop took frame apart just in case stop contains letter makes little sense but could be devastating to third party stop situation re inheritance completely changed since death of Joseph Boynet not natural so murderer and accomplice unable claim money stop am doing my duty but ask you entertain reservations your end stop will be in Paris this evening stop Étienne Monfils.

'You don't think my client ...' the lawyer began.

'Your client finds himself in a no-win situation, Maître Leloup ... I never even thought of that! If Joseph Boynet was killed by his wife and her lover, her fortune automatically reverts to the Boynets and the Machepieds.'

'But ...'

The inspector wasn't listening. He stood motionless in the middle of the monumental corridor of the Police Judiciaire, from which he could see the door of his office. Beside him was the glazed partition of the waiting room, where, one foggy morning ...

A baby being born somewhere would never know that the expenses of its birth would be paid for by certain gentlemen whose fingers were heavily laden with rings. At this time of day, they would be absorbed in the subtleties of a game of cards at Albert's, the bar in Rue Blanche.

What was Monsieur Charles thinking of as he talked privately to his lawyer under the discreet surveillance of the mild-mannered Inspector Torrence?

'Not so stupid after all!' He jumped at the sound of his own voice, and so did Spencer Oats and Maître Leloup, who weren't expecting it.

'Sorry, I was thinking about the photograph trick,' he apologized. 'The old woman knew her cousin, and she knew provincial life ... Well, come on,

gentlemen, let's get down to work.'

And he gave a snort before beginning to question everyone who had visited the Police Judiciaire on the morning of the crime.

It was one in the morning when a little pimp abandoned both his extinguished cigarette end and all attempts to deny his involvement. 'All right, I only wanted to do someone a favour, and I'm the one who's been done! What am I looking at, inspector? Two years?'

Madame Maigret had already phoned three times.

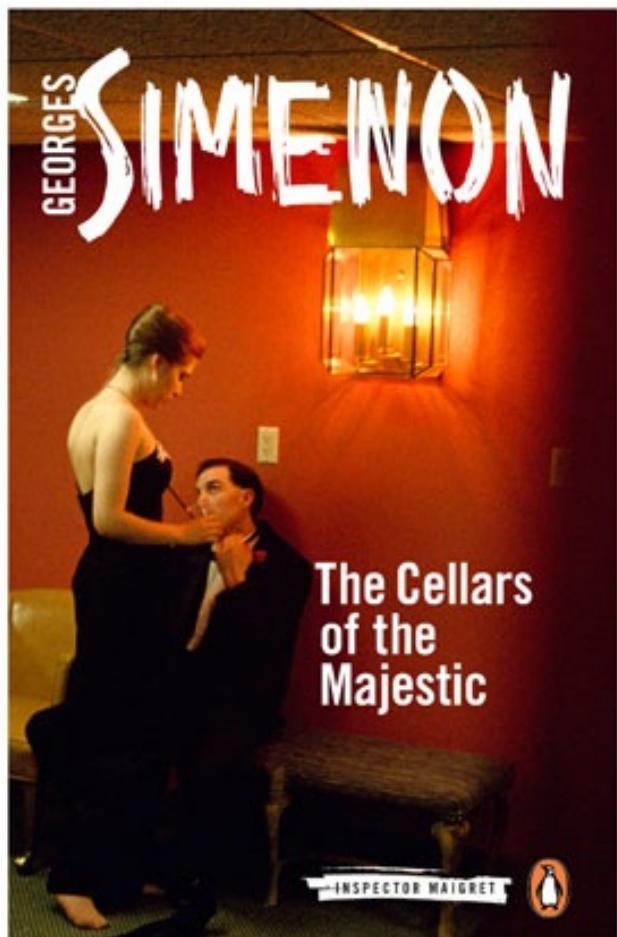
'Hello? No ... don't wait up for me. I could be home rather late.'

He suddenly felt he could fancy some sauerkraut with all the trimmings in a brasserie in Montmartre or Montparnasse. Then he and his American friend took each other on from bar to bar. And what with one thing leading to another, from one beer to the next, the whole night passed by. Well, Spencer Oats had to have some stories to tell back home in Philadelphia, didn't he?

And never mind the fact that he, Maigret, owed Monfils for the idea of taking the photograph frame apart ...



**READ ON FOR AN EXTRACT FROM THE
NEXT INSPECTOR MAIGRET NOVEL**



**INSPECTOR
MAIGRET**



1. Prosper Donge's Tyre

A car door slamming. That was always the first noise of the day. The engine still running outside. Charlotte was presumably shaking the driver's hand. Then the taxi drove away. Footsteps. The key in the lock and the click of a light switch.

A match was struck in the kitchen, and the gas stove made a *phjfft* sound as it came on.

Slowly, like someone who has spent all night standing up, Charlotte climbed the overly new staircase. She came noiselessly into the bedroom. Another light switch. A bulb came on, with a pink handkerchief over it as a lampshade and wooden tassels at the four corners of the handkerchief.

Prosper Donge had not opened his eyes. Charlotte looked at herself in the wardrobe mirror as she undressed. When she got down to her girdle and brassiere, she sighed. She was as fat and pink as a Rubens, but she was obsessive about squeezing herself in. Once naked, she rubbed the flesh where there were marks.

She had an unpleasant way of getting into bed, kneeling on it first, which made the base tilt to one side.

'Your turn, Prosper!'

He got up. She quickly huddled into the warm hollow he had left behind, pulled the blankets up to her eyes and stopped moving.

'Is it raining?' he asked as he flushed the toilet.

A vague grunt. It didn't matter. The water for shaving was ice cold. Trains could be heard passing.

Prosper Donge got dressed. From time to time, Charlotte sighed, because she couldn't get to sleep while the light was on. He had one hand already on the doorknob and was stretching his right arm towards the light switch when he heard a thick voice:

'Don't forget to go and pay the instalment for the wireless.'

On the kitchen stove, the coffee was hot, too hot. He drank it standing up. Then, like all those who make the same gestures at the same time every day, he wrapped a knitted scarf around his neck and put on his coat and cap.

Finally, he took his bicycle, which was in the passage, and pushed it outside.

Invariably, at that hour, he was greeted by a breath of cold, damp air, and there was wetness on the cobbles, even though it hadn't rained; the people asleep behind the closed shutters would probably know only a warm, sunny day.

The street, lined with detached houses and little gardens, sloped steeply downwards. Sometimes, between two trees, the lights of Paris could be glimpsed, as if at the bottom of a chasm.

It was no longer night, but it wasn't yet day. The air was mauve. The lights were coming on in a few windows, and Prosper Donge braked before he got to the level crossing, which was closed. He had to get across through the gates.

After the Pont de Saint-Cloud, he turned left. A tugboat followed by its string of barges was whistling furiously, asking for the lock gate to be opened.

The Bois de Boulogne ... The lakes reflecting a paler sky, with swans waking up ...

Just as he reached Porte Dauphine, the ground suddenly felt harder beneath Donge's wheels. He went a few more metres, then got off and had a look. His rear tyre was flat.

He looked at his watch. It was ten to six. He began walking quickly, pushing his bicycle, and there was a slight mist in front of his lips, while the heat of the effort burned his chest inside.

Avenue Foch ... Closed shutters in all the mansions ... A high-ranking officer, followed only by his orderly, was trotting along the bridle path ...

Light behind the Arc de Triomphe ... He was hurrying now ... He felt really hot ...

Just at the corner of the Champs-Élysées, a policeman in a cape, standing near the news stand, cried out:

'Flat tyre?'

He nodded. Three hundred metres to go. The Hotel Majestic, on the left, with all its shutters closed. The street-lamps were no longer giving out much light.

He turned into Rue de Berri, then Rue de Ponthieu. A little bar was open. Two buildings further on, a door that passers-by never noticed, the service entrance of the Majestic.

A man was just coming out. A suit could be glimpsed under his grey coat. He was bare-headed. He had slicked-back hair, and Prosper Donge assumed it was the dancer, Zebio.

He could have glanced into the bar to make sure, but the thought never occurred to him. Still pushing his bicycle, he entered a long grey passage lit by a single light. He stopped by the clocking-on machine, turned the wheel, inserted the card into his number, 67, and as he did so glanced at the little clock on the machine, which showed ten past six. A click.

It was now an established fact that he had entered the Majestic at ten past six in the morning, ten minutes later than usual.

Such, at least, was the official statement of Prosper Donge, the head coffee maker for the luxury hotel on the Champs-Élysées.

As for what happened next, he claimed that he had continued to act as he did every morning.

At that hour, the vast basement areas with their complicated corridors, their multiple doors, their walls painted grey like the gangways of a freighter, were deserted. Through the glass partitions, all you could see, here and there, were the dim bulbs with their yellowish filaments which constituted the night lighting.

Everything had glass partitions, the kitchens on the left, then the bakery. Opposite, the room known as the couriers' room, where the higher-ranking staff ate, along with the guests' private domestics, their chambermaids and chauffeurs.

A bit further along, the dining room for the lower-grade staff, with its long white wooden tables and its benches like the kind you find in schools.

Finally, dominating the basement like the bridge of a ship, a smaller glass cage, where the bookkeeper sat, the man whose job it was to check everything that came out of the kitchens.

As he opened the door to the coffee room, Prosper Donge had the impression that someone was climbing the narrow staircase that led to the upper floors, but paid no attention. That at least was what appeared subsequently in his statement.

Just as Charlotte had done on entering their suburban house, he now struck a match, and the gas made a *phffji* sound under the smallest of the percolators, the one that came on first for the few guests who got up early.

Only once he had done that did he go into the locker room. This was quite a large room along one of the corridors. There were several wash-basins, a greyish mirror and, along the walls, tall, narrow metal lockers, each bearing a number.

With his key, he opened locker 67. He took off his coat, scarf and hat. He changed shoes: for his day's work he preferred elastic-sided shoes, which were softer. He put on a white jacket.

A few more minutes ... At half past six, the basement areas started coming to life ...

Up above, everything was asleep, apart from the night porter, who was waiting in the deserted lobby to be relieved.

The percolator hissed. Donge filled a cup with coffee and set off up the staircase, which was like one of those mysterious staircases you find backstage in theatres that lead to the most unexpected places.

When he opened a narrow door, he found himself in the lobby cloakroom. Nobody would have guessed the door was there, covered as it was with a large mirror.

'Coffee!' he announced, placing the cup on the cloakroom counter. 'How's it going?'

'Fine!' the night porter grunted as he approached.

Donge went back downstairs. His three women, the Three Fat Ladies as they were known, had arrived. They were lower-class women, all three ugly, one of them old and bad-tempered. They were already washing cups and saucers in the sink, making a great clatter.

As for Donge, he did what he did every day, arranged the silver coffee pots in order of size: one cup, two cups, three cups ... Then the little milk jugs ... the teapots ...

In the bookkeeper's glass cage, he glimpsed Jean Ramuel, his hair dishevelled.

'He must have slept here again!' he observed.

For three or four nights now, the bookkeeper, Ramuel, had been sleeping at the hotel rather than going home, which was somewhere in Montparnasse.

As a rule, that was forbidden. At the very end of the corridor, near the door concealing the stairs to the lower basement, where the wines were kept, there was indeed a room with three or four beds. But theoretically they were reserved for those members of staff who needed a breather between busy periods.

Donge waved a brief hello to Ramuel, who responded with a similarly vague gesture.

Next, it was the turn of the head chef, huge and self-important, who had just returned from Les Halles with a lorry that parked in Rue de Ponthieu to be unloaded by his assistants.

By half past seven, at least thirty people were bustling about in the basements of the Majestic. Bells started ringing, the dumb waiters came down, stopped and went back up with trays, while Ramuel stuck white, blue and pink slips on the iron spikes lined up on his desk.

At that hour, the day porter, in his light-blue uniform, was just taking over the lobby and the mail clerk was sorting through the mail in his box room. It must be sunny in the Champs-Elysees but, in the basement, the only thing you were aware of was the rumbling of the buses making the glass partitions vibrate.

A few minutes after nine – at exactly 9.04, as they were able to establish – Prosper Donge left the coffee room and a few seconds later entered the locker room.

'I'd left my handkerchief in my coat!' he stated when he was questioned.

Be that as it may, he now found himself alone in the room with its hundred metal lockers. Did he open his own? Nobody was there to witness it. Did he get his handkerchief? It was possible.

There weren't a hundred, but exactly ninety-two lockers, all numbered. The last five were empty.

Why did it occur to Prosper Donge to open locker 89, which, not belonging to anyone, wasn't locked?

'I did it without thinking ...' he asserted. 'The door was ajar ... I never imagined ...'

What was in this locker was a body which must have been pushed into it in an upright position and had collapsed in on itself. It was the body of a woman of about thirty, very blonde – artificially blonde, in fact – wearing a thin black woollen dress.

Donge did not cry out. Looking quite pale, he approached Ramuel's glass cage and bent down to speak through the opening.

'Come and have a look ...'

The bookkeeper followed him.

'Stay here ... Don't let anyone get too close ...'

Ramuel rushed upstairs, emerged in the lobby cloakroom and spotted the porter in conversation with a chauffeur.

'Has the manager arrived?'

The porter gestured with his chin towards the manager's office.

Standing by the revolving door, Maigret was on the point of knocking his pipe against his heel to empty it. Then he shrugged and put it back between his teeth. It was his first pipe of the morning, the best one.

'The manager's expecting you, sir ...'

The lobby was not very busy yet. There was only an Englishman arguing with the mail clerk, and a young girl walking on her long grasshopper legs, carrying a hatbox, which she was presumably delivering.

Maigret walked into the manager's office. The manager shook his hand without a word and indicated an armchair. A green curtain concealed the glass door, but you just had to pull it slightly to see everything that was happening in the lobby.

'Cigar?'

'No, thanks ...'

They had known each other for a long time. They didn't need many words. The manager was wearing striped trousers, a dark jacket with edging and a tie that seemed to have been cut out of some stiff material.

'Here ...'

He pushed a registration form across the table.

Oswald J. Clark, industrialist, of Detroit, Michigan (USA). Coming from Detroit.

Arrived 12 February

Accompanied by: Mrs Clark, his wife; Teddy Clark, 7, his son; Ellen Darroman, 24, governess; Gertrud Borms, 42, maid.

Suite 203.

Phone calls. The manager answered impatiently. Maigret folded the form in four and slipped it into his wallet.

‘Which one is it?’

‘Mrs Clark ...’

‘Ah!’

‘The hotel doctor, whom I telephoned immediately after alerting the Police Judiciaire, and who lives nearby, in Rue de Berri, is downstairs. He says Mrs Clark was strangled between six and six thirty in the morning.’

The manager was glum. Pointless telling a man like Maigret that it was a disaster for the hotel and that if there was any way of hushing the whole thing up

...

‘So the Clark family have been here for a week ...’ Maigret said. ‘What kind of people are they?’

‘Oh, perfectly respectable ... He’s a tall, strong-looking American, a cool character, about forty ... Perhaps forty-five ... His wife – poor thing – must have been French originally ... Twenty-eight or twenty-nine ... I didn’t see much of her ... The governess is pretty ... The maid, who works as the child’s nurse, fairly ordinary, rather forbidding ... Oh, by the way, I almost forgot ... Clark left for Rome yesterday morning ...’

‘By himself?’

‘From what I gathered, he’s in Europe on business ... He owns a factory that makes ball bearings ... He has to visit the major capitals, and in the meantime decided to leave his wife, son and staff in Paris ...’

‘What train?’ Maigret asked.

The manager picked up the telephone. ‘Hello! Porter? ... What train did Mr Clark take yesterday? ... That’s right, 203 ... Did you send any luggage on to the station? ... He only took a travelling bag? ... A taxi? ... Desire’s taxi? ... Thanks ...’

‘Did you hear that, inspector? He left at eleven yesterday morning by taxi, Desire’s taxi, which is almost always parked in front of the hotel. He only had a travelling bag with him ...’

‘Do you mind if I also make a phone call? ... Hello! Police Judiciaire, please, mademoiselle ... Police Judiciare? ... Lucas? ... Go straight to Gare de Lyon ... Find out about trains to Rome since eleven o’clock yesterday morning ...’

As he continued to give instructions, his pipe went out.

‘Tell Torrence to find Desire’s taxi ... Yes ... Usually parked outside the Majestic ... Find out where he took a passenger, a tall, slim American he picked up yesterday from the hotel ... OK ...’

He looked for an ashtray to empty his pipe. The manager handed him one.

‘Are you sure you don’t want a cigar? ... The nurse is beside herself ... I thought it best to inform her ... As for the governess, she didn’t sleep at the hotel last night ...’

‘What floor is the suite?’

‘Second floor ... With a view of the Champs-Elysees ... Mr Clark’s room, separated by a sitting room from his wife’s room ... Then the child’s room, the nurse’s and finally the governess’s ... They asked to be put together ...’

‘Is the night porter still here?’

‘No, but I know, from needing him once, that he can be contacted by phone ... His wife is the concierge of a new apartment block in Neuilly ... Hello! ... Get me ...’

Within five minutes, they had learned that Mrs Clark had gone to the theatre by herself the previous evening and had got back a few minutes after midnight. The nurse hadn’t gone out. As for the governess, she hadn’t dined at the hotel and hadn’t been back all night.

‘Shall we go downstairs and have a look?’ Maigret sighed.

There were more people in the lobby by now, but none of them suspected the drama that had taken place while everyone was asleep.

‘We’ll go this way ... Would you please follow me, inspector? ...’

As he said this, the manager frowned. The revolving door was moving. A young woman in a grey tailored suit came in at the same time as a ray of sunlight. Passing the mail clerk, she asked in English:

‘Anything for me?’

‘That’s her, inspector, Miss Ellen Darroman ...’

Fine, well-fitting silk stockings. The prim and proper look of someone who has taken great care over her grooming. No trace of fatigue on her face but, on

the contrary, a pink glow caused by the brisk air of a fine February morning.

‘Do you want to talk to her?’

‘Not just yet ... One moment ...’

Maigret walked over to an inspector he had brought with him, who was standing in a corner of the lobby.

‘Don’t let that young woman out of your sight ... If she goes into her suite, stand outside the door ...’

The cloakroom. The big mirror swung open on its hinges. Maigret and the manager found themselves on the narrow staircase. All at once, there was no more gilt, no more pot plants, no more elegant bustle. A kitchen smell rose from below.

‘Does this staircase serve all the floors?’

‘There are two like this ... They go from the lower basement to the attics ... But you have to know the place well to use them ... On each floor, for example, there’s just a little door like all the others, without a number, and it would never occur to any of the guests ...’

It was nearly eleven. Now there were no longer just fifty, but more like a hundred and fifty people swarming about the basement, some in white chefs’ hats, the others in waiters’ uniforms or cellarmen’s aprons, and the women, like Prosper Donge’s Three Fat Ladies, doing the heavy work ...

‘This way ... Make sure you don’t slip or dirty your clothes ... The corridors are narrow ...’

Through the glass partitions, everybody was watching the manager and above all the inspector. Jean Ramuel continued grabbing the slips he was being passed, almost in mid-air, and checking the contents of the trays at a glance.

The jarring element was the unexpected figure of a policeman standing guard outside the locker room. The doctor, who was very young, had been informed of Maigret’s arrival and was smoking a cigarette as he waited.

‘Close the door ...’

The body was there, on the floor, surrounded by all the metal lockers. The doctor, still smoking, murmured:

‘She must have been grabbed from behind ... She didn’t struggle for long ...’

And the body wasn’t dragged along the floor!’ Maigret added, examining the dead woman’s dark clothes. ‘There’s no trace of dust ... Either she was killed

here, or she was carried here, most likely by two people, because it'd be difficult in this maze of narrow corridors ...'

In the locker where she had been discovered, there was a crocodile-skin handbag. Maigret opened it and took out an automatic revolver, which he slipped into his pocket after checking the safety catch. Nothing else in the bag apart from a handkerchief, a compact and a few banknotes that amounted to no more than a thousand francs.

Behind them, the hive was buzzing. The dumb waiters kept going up and down, bells rang endlessly, and, behind the glass partition of the kitchens, you could see heavy copper saucepans being handled and dozens of chickens being put on the spit.

'Everything has to be left where it is until the examining magistrate gets here,' Maigret said. 'Who was it who found ...?'

He was pointed in the direction of Prosper Donge, who was cleaning one of the percolators. He was a tall man with red hair, the kind of red hair that is called carrot-coloured. He might have been about forty-five or forty-eight. He had blue eyes and a pockmarked face.

'Have you employed him for long?'

'Five years ... Before that, he was at the Miramar in Cannes ...'

'Reliable?'

'As reliable as could be ...'

A glass partition separated Donge and Maigret. Through the glass, their eyes met, and the blood rushed to Donge's cheeks: like all redheads, he had delicate skin.

'Excuse me, sir ... Detective Chief Inspector Maigret is wanted on the telephone ...'

It was Jean Ramuel, the bookkeeper, who had just emerged from his cage.

'If you'd like to take the call here.'

A message from the Police Judiciaire. Since eleven o'clock the previous day, there had been only two express trains for Rome. Oswald J. Clark had caught neither. As for the driver, Désiré, who had been reached by phone in a bistro where he was a regular, he stated that he had driven his previous day's fare to the Hotel Aiglon on Boulevard Montparnasse.

Voices on the staircase, including a young woman shrilly protesting in English to a valet who was trying to bar her way.

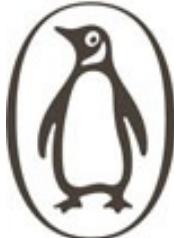
It was the governess, Ellen Darroman, who was charging straight at them.



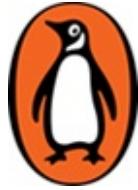
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